# FOLKLORE OF WELLS

R. P. MASANI



# FOLKLORE OF WELLS





Floating of lamps during the Kartik Bath.

# FOLKLORE OF WELLS

BEING A STUDY OF

# WATER-WORSHIP

IN EAST AND WEST

BY

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# INTRODUCTION.

For literary conceits and dreams of authorship there is no more powerful antidote than the tedium of official life. It radically cures all such morbid propensities. This little book, however, owes its inspiration to office routine. It was in connection with official business that my interest in the subject of water-worship was awakened about six years ago when in my capacity as Municipal Secretary of Bombay I received several protests against requisitions for the closing of wells.

In the course of its campaign against malaria the Municipality had to call upon owners of wells breeding anopheles mosquitos to close them. The owners protested against these orders and in their petitions they cited traditions concerning the sanctity of water and related stories of spirits residing in the wells which to one ignorant of the social organization and customs of the people might appear to be nothing more than old wives' tales and babble, or mere pretexts to shirk civic responsibilities, but which a student of traditional lore has learnt to prize as priceless fragments of information concerning the condition of human thought of bygone ages. Often during one's investigation of such local accounts one comes across examples where history is in close contact with popular tradition, illustrating abundantly the inherent value of what Sir Henry Maine slightingly called "the slippery testimony concerning savages which is gathered from travellers' tales." Looked at from that point of view, the curious beliefs and customs referred to in those petitions revealed divers elements of sociological and ethnological importance leading back to the days of the ancestors of the petitioners, and affording glimpses of remote, unexplored periods of antiquity when people unknown to history dwelt in the particular localities from which the petitioners hailed and

left behind them a heritage of their mental strivings and conceptions concerning wells and springs and other natural objects. All this local lore of wells established, beyond doubt, the prevalence of water-worship amongst educated Hindus and Parsis residing in Bombay. It was, however, a medley of many divergent elements. To docket and classify all the constituent elements of this folklore, to trace their origin and to throw fresh light on the different stages of culture of the early settlers in the island of Bombay, was a task far beyond my capacity. Nevertheless, it seemed to me it would be a sin to allow such precious gems of information to remain buried in the dusky archives of the Municipality. I therefore culled from the official correspondence such gems as I could lay my hands on, made personal investigations about local wells, gathered additional information and read a paper on the Folklore of Bombay Wells before the Anthropological Society of Bombay on the 30th August 1916.

It was natural that my interest in the subject should grow as I proceeded. What struck me most during my studies and inquiries was the striking resemblance in the traditions, customs, rites and ceremonies prevailing in India and those in vogue in European countries. It was clear, moreover, that until recently the cult of water flourished in the West in a more primitive and much ruder form than in India. I was, therefore, tempted to read before the Society a second paper on the subject and this was followed by another on the rituals of water-worship and the sundry offerings to water-spirits in East and West.

It was impossible to bring within the range of these papers all the materials I had collected. As the series was primarily intended to expound the lore of wells only, a good deal remained unsaid concerning the divine seas and springs and tanks and cataracts. I, therefore, thought of completing the series and publishing a volume embodying the varied water-cults, localising and classifying them, and tracing, as far as possible, their genealogy with a view to elucidating the early life of the people who

lived in the different localities from time to time and their relationship with the ancestors of the long-forgotten races of other climes in which such ideas and customs also prevailed. It was a very ambitious project, but I was tempted to set about it as in the bibliography of anthropological literature I could not find a single volume specially devoted to the subject. I was, however, unable to make much progress for some months owing to other engagements.

A few days ago, when I was sitting on the Versova sands, musing on life's uncertainties and the vanity of human wishes, recalling Tennyson's words "so many worlds, so much to do, so little done, such things to be," methought I heard a water-nymph questioning me from under the pale-green sea-groves: "How many years wilt thou dream away before thou completest that work? Why not immediately convey to thy readers our invitation to the concerts of the nymphs?" At once I recalled that eight years had rolled by since I had resolved to complete another series of anthropological papers, viz., Naming Customs and Name Superstitions, just as I had thought of elaborating the water-worship series, but that I had not been able to take the work in hand in the midst of rapidly increasing daily duties. What chance was there of better success in regard to this new work? I, therefore, thought it advisable to publish the papers as read before the Society without further delay. Their publication in book-form has, however, necessitated a somewhat unsatisfactory arrangement of chapters, and for this and other demerits I owe an apology to the reader.

It might perhaps be said that such a gallimaufry of divers tales and traditions, beliefs and superstitions long current among different people in different countries treats the reader to nothing new. It might also be urged that these traditions and customs are mere survivals of a particular phase of animism with which we are all familiar, that we all know that from remote ages our ancestors have peopled trees and plants, stocks and stones, dales and hills, and seas and springs

with all sorts of spirits, visible and invisible, and that it is upon this spirit-world of pre-historic man that the primeval nature-worship of our Aryan ancestors was based, upon which again rest the religions and philosophies of the civilised world. This is all very true. Veneration of water is undoubtedly a phase of nature-worship. The student of history knows why from the remotest ages Egypt, Babylon, India and China became centres of population in the East and why the plains of Lombardy and Netherlands attracted waves of humanity in the West. Naturally, man gravitated towards districts where food was easily obtainable. Valleys and plains fertilized by springs became his home. Water to him was not only the prime necessity of life, but the birth-place, so to say, of life. Moreover, the primitive mind associated life with motion. It saw spirits in rolling stones and swinging boughs. How could it remain unconscious of the spirits controlling the many-sounding seas and bubbling rivers and tumbling waterfalls? This is the *raison d'être* of the universality of water-worship. No new work on the folklore of wells is needed to tell us that, but, as I have just stated, such folklore contains valuable details of social conditions and the early history of races and if it puts in the hands of the student of antiquities a key to the sealed book of some unexplored stages of the cultural history, howsoever fragmentary, of forgotten races, its publication would not be wholly in vain.

Races flourish and vanish, but their concepts and customs live in their successors. These successors are not necessarily their descendants. Often they are invaders and conquerors, sometimes refugees, professing altogether different creeds, but with the estates and objects which they inherit from their predecessors they also inherit their mental strivings and traditions and customs and hand these down from generation to generation. These in their turn influence others, wherever they go. Thus it is that we see ancient customs and ceremonies observed, even to this day, with very little variation, by different communities, even though separated by oceans.

Numerous illustrations may be given of this parallelism of beliefs prevailing in different places and their persistence in different culture eras. One remarkable instance is the preservation of the bridge-sacrifice traditions. It is referred to by Sir Laurence Gomme in *Folklore as an Historical Science* in the course of his analysis of the legend of the Pedlar of Lambeth and the treasure stories centering round London Bridge. The bridge was the work of the Romans of Lundinium—a marvellous enterprise in the eyes of the Celtic tribesmen who believed that the building of the bridge was accompanied by human sacrifice. This is confirmed by the preservation in Wales of another tradition relating to the "Devil's Bridge" near Beddgelert. "Many of the ignorant people of the neighbourhood believe that this structure was formed by supernatural agency. The devil proposed to the neighbouring inhabitants that he would build them a bridge across the pass on condition that he should have the first who went over it for his trouble. The bargain was made, and the bridge appeared in its place, but the people cheated the devil by dragging a dog to the spot and whipping him over the bridge." When the Calcutta authorities proposed to build a bridge over the Hoogly River, the ignorant masses apprehended that the first requirement would be a human sacrifice for the foundation. The news went to England from the *London and China Telegraph* from which the *Newcastle Chronicle* of 9th February 1889 copied the following statement :—

"The boatmen on the Ganges, near Rajmenal, somehow came to believe that the Government required a hundred thousand human heads as the foundation for a great bridge, and that the Government officers were going about the river in search of heads. A hunting party, consisting of four Europeans, happening to pass in a boat, were set upon by the one hundred and twenty boatmen, with the cry *Gulla Katta* or cut-throats, and only escaped with their lives after the greatest difficulty."

Thirteen years ago, when the Sandhurst bridge was under construction, a poor old man suspected of taking a child for being interred in the foundations of the bridge was mercilessly belaboured in the streets of Bombay. The boy was inclined to play truant and did not wish to go home with the old man. Some one started the canard that he had sold the head of the child for bridge-sacrifice, the mob took it up and only after great difficulty the unfortunate man was rescued by the Police. Curiously enough, only a few days ago I gathered from the story of a Mahomedan lad, who was brought to me for admission to the home of the Society for the Protection of Children, that another bridge-sacrifice panic had recently seized the good people of Bankipur. The boy, named Abdulla Bakar, aged 11, being an orphan, was working as a cooly in Bankipur. He told the Society's agent, and also repeated to me, that he had been greatly alarmed by the report he had heard in the streets of that city that children were buried alive in the foundations of a bridge that was being built somewhere near.

No less persistent is the traditional dread of spirits haunting pools and rapids. Until recently we used to hear in Bombay that the spirits residing in the wells near the Bombay Gymkhana waylaid and drowned people who disturbed them in the evening. Similar beliefs are still current in England. In the *Transactions of the Folklore Society* has been recorded the following example of persistence of the superstitious dread of water: A man was drowned in the Derwent in January 1904. "He didna know Darrant," commented an old neighbour, with a triumphant tone in her voice, "he said it were nought but a brook. But Darrant got him! They never saw his head, he threw his arms up, but Darrant wouldna let him go. Aye, it's a sad pity—seven children? But he shouldna ha' made so light of Darrant. He knows now! Nought but a brook! He knows now!" "She talked of the river as if it were a living personage or deity," wrote the narrator, "I could almost imagine the next step would be to take it offerings." Jenny

Greenteeth still lurks under the weeds of stagnant pools in Shropshire and Lancashire and in the following pages will be found examples of numerous water-spirits residing in or hovering round Indian wells and tanks.

Folklore tells us that mermaids threatened floods if offended by drainage schemes. Would that some fair denizens of the waters of Araby had raised up their heads from the *pātāls* when the schemes for the drainage of Bombay were under consideration and when Worli point was selected for the outfall! On that occasion even God Varuna, the lord of all waters, and the Nagas and Nagins, the semi-divine sovereigns of the watery regions, half men and half serpents, and the whole band of sea-spirits were mysteriously silent and forbearing, but the well-spirits are not so tame. They will not allow another municipal atrocity lying down. Some have exacted the toll of human life, others have evinced their wrath by breaking open the coverings enforced by the Municipality, while some weak spirits, for whom the concrete covers have proved too strong, have been haunting the neighbourhood and inducing the owners of wells and, failing them, responsive neighbours, to re-open the wells. Only a few weeks ago, a Hindu member of the Bombay Municipal Corporation told me that a Parsi residing in a house adjoining his property in Dhus Wadi assured him that a *sayyid* residing in the well of his house, which had been closed in compliance with a municipal requisition, had been visiting the Parsi in dreams and imploring him to get the well opened, promising him saintly favours. He could not understand why the cabined spirit should not seek the assistance of the Hindu inmates or of the Hindu owner of the very house in which the well was situated, but go instead to the Parsi neighbour. The reason, however, is not far to seek.

The Bombay Parsi is a born venerator of water. He may be seen any day on the beach, dipping his fingers in the water and applying it to his eyes and forehead, lifting his hands in prayers and wafting his soul to the realms of the Great

Unknown. To all that is pure, sublime and beautiful in the universe the Zoroastrian paid willing homage. Accordingly, water-worship was a general cult amongst the Parsis in their ancestral home. It was, however, a means of looking up through nature to nature's God. It merely postulated the presence of a beneficent spirit permeating water. There was no suggestion, whatsoever, of water-goblins haunting wells and springs. How, then, did the present-day Parsi come to imbibe the belief in such minor deities and how did he come to give them a local habitation and a name? This is a question of absorbing interest from the point of view of the folklorist. India is *par excellence* the land of goblindom and it is but natural that the spirit-world of the Parsis should expand in the land of their adoption. With their mind attuned to the worship of water they came readily under the influence of the *genii locorum*. The most curious feature, however, of this Parsi belief in Moslem water-spirits is that amongst the Mahomedans themselves no such belief prevails or ever did prevail. They believe, no doubt, in saints who have endowed springs and wells, but no Mahomedan *sayyid* or *pir* has or ever had his home or haunt in water. Neither does a Mahomedan believe in any other benevolent or malevolent indwelling spirit of the well. The installation of Mahomedan saints in the wells of Parsi households is therefore an anthropological puzzle for the solution of which we must make a joint appeal to history and folklore. It is evidently a case of substitution and amalgamation of beliefs and it is cases such as these that call for research in the localisation of popular beliefs and their ethnic genealogy. People inhabiting modern culture areas have an anthropological as well as a national or political history and without the anthropological history it is impossible to explain the meaning and existence of a number of beliefs and customs prevailing in a particular community. It is, therefore, necessary to classify all the Indian cults of water according to their ethnological and geographical distribution and to carry on research in the genealogy of the different conceptions and customs prevailing in different parts. In this



Parsis on the sea-beach in Bombay.



Offerings to the Gunbow Well.

way we may arrive at different historical landmarks, working backwards from which we may get some glimpses of the political, social, psychological and religious history of the older races that lived in this country. Water-worship, like stone-worship, is a non-Aryan custom and without some research in the history of the non-Aryan races that dwelt in the land before the advent of the Aryans it will not be possible to account for the savagery of many of the forms and rituals of this worship as it now prevails amongst the Aryan races.

In the following pages I have sought to indicate what scope there is for such research work and I have devoted a special chapter to Sir Laurence Gomme's luminous analysis of the water cults prevailing in Britain and its isles with a view to indicating the methods of research adopted by him. If we follow the same lines in tracing the ancestry of the Indian customs and beliefs, we may hope to throw some fresh light on the cultural history of the ancestors, or at all events the immediate predecessors, of the people among whom we now find them prevailing. I do not profess to have accomplished anything of the kind in this book. It is really not want of time so much as the consciousness of sheer inability to do justice to the theme that has deterred me from launching upon a scientific survey of the varying forms of water-worship. Circumstances permitting, after further study and research, I may venture to essay it and place before the public a more studied and comprehensive volume on the subject, meanwhile this little book will not have been published in vain if it leads some student of anthropology to embark on such a survey and I shall be better pleased indeed to see this fascinating subject comprehensively dealt with by one of the masters of the science of folklore.

I trust I have duly acknowledged, at the proper places, all the authorities I have consulted. I cannot conclude, however, without expressing my special indebtedness to the works of that distinguished Town Clerk and student of local lore, the late

Sir Laurence Gomme. My thanks are also due to my esteemed teacher and friend, Mr. J. D. Bharda, for the interest he has taken in this work and for his helpful suggestions when the sheets were passing through the press.

BOMBAY,
*March* 21*st*, 1918.

R. P. M.

# PART I.

## FOLKLORE OF BOMBAY WELLS.



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# CHAPTER I.

## SANCTITY OF WATER.

Time was when the whole earth, the fever-stricken isle of Bombay included, was free from fevers. One unlucky day, however, Daksha Prajapati and his son-in-law Shiva fell out and their discord brought with it a whole crop of fevers. The story runs that Daksha Prajapati once celebrated a great sacrifice to which he did not invite Shiva. All humanity had to suffer for this insult which greatly incensed Shiva whose breath during those moments of fury emitted eight frightful fevers.

In the good old days, however, a magic thread (*dora*), or a charm (*mantra*), was enough to scare the fever-spirit away.[1] In obstinate cases, no doubt, the spirit had to be exorcised from the body of the patient by a *Bhuva* or *Bhagat* and transferred to some animate or inanimate object, or perhaps a cock or a goat or a buffalo had to be sacrificed to propitiate the disease-deity. That, however, was all. A special offering for the Benares godling *Jvaraharisvara*, "the god who repels the fever," was *Dudhbhanga*, a confection of milk (*dudh*), leaves of the hemp plant (*bhanga*) and sweets.

Of all such remedies and expedients the simplest and the quaintest was that for driving the malaria fiend away. One had only to listen to the story of *Ekānterio*, the spirit controlling intermittent fever, and one got immunity for ever. The

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[1] Even to this day people in rural England scare away the spirit of ague by saying "Ague! farewell till we meet in hell." Similarly, they appease the spirit of cramp by saying "Cramp, be thou faultless, as our Lady was when she bore Jesus."

legend runs that once a Bania, on his way to a village, came across a banyan tree where he unyoked his bullocks and went to a distance in search of water. *Ekānterio*, who resided in this tree, carried away the Bania's carriage together with his family. The Bania was much surprised to miss them, but he soon found out the author of the trick and pursued *Ekānterio*. That fever-goblin, however, would not listen to the Bania's entreaties to return his carriage, and the matter was at last referred for arbitration to Bochki Bai. She decided in favour of the Bania, and confined *Ekānterio* in a bamboo tube whence he was released on condition that he would never attack those who listened to this story.[1]

To-day in our midst there are no such story-tellers, no such Bhuvas and medicine-men, or, if there are any, they are seldom given a chance. We rather like to listen to the stories of the microscope and pin our faith to the doctor and the scientist. These men of science scent *Ekānterio* in every anopheles mosquito and tell us that malarial fever is conveyed from one human being to another by the bite of this ubiquitous insect. Therefore, if we wish to stamp out malaria, we must wage a crusade against this vast army of *Ekānterio*. It is well known that these mosquitoes breed in water and that they are particularly fond of well water. One of the measures that the Bombay Municipality has therefore to enforce in connection with its campaign against malaria is the closing of wells containing the larvæ of these mosquitoes. In the early stages of the campaign, however, it gave rise to vehement protests. These were prompted not merely by utilitarian motives, but also by religious sentiments and supernatural beliefs. The aggrieved parties gave chapter and verse to show that their scriptures enjoined the use of well water, and well water only, in connection with divers ceremonies, and they further relied on several popular beliefs investing the water of wells with

[1] Folklore Notes, Vol. I.—Gujarat.

supernatural efficacy. We shall record a few typical examples of such beliefs and convictions and a few traditions concerning several wells of Bombay, culled from the official correspondence on the subject and other sources, and we shall see in the course of our survey that these merely present, with a little local colouring, the particular primitive phase of nature-worship under which all nations inhabiting the globe have held in the past, and do hold to a certain extent even now, springs and wells in religious reverence and awe, regarding the water thereof as a living organism or as a dwelling-place of spirits.

When the owner of an objectionable well is asked by the Municipality either to fill up the well or to cover it, he invariably prefers the second alternative, provided he is allowed to cover the well with wire gauze or at least to provide a wire gauze trap-door for drawing water. The reason given in most of the cases is that according to tenets and established customs the water required for religious ceremonies must be exposed directly to the rays of the sun and that water not so exposed is rendered unfit for the purpose. The Parsis cite their scriptures and the Hindus theirs in support of this contention. It is unnecessary for our present purpose to quote the injunctions of the scriptures, but it is interesting to note how they are construed and understood.

When the Health Officer, Dr. J. A. Turner, was overwhelmed by all sorts of religious objections to the closing of wells, he consulted recognised authorities on Parsi religion as to the precise requirements of the scriptures and the manner in which the object of the Department could be carried out without wounding the religious susceptibilities of the Parsis. Dr. J. J. Modi gave his opinion as follows, referring to a ceremony of peculiar interest to the students of scriptural lore :—

"As, according to Parsi books, the sun is considered to be a great purifier, it is required that the well must be exposed to the rays of the sun. So a well hermetically covered with wood or metal is prohibited. But one 'hermetically covered with wire

gauze of very fine mesh,' as suggested by you, would serve the purpose and would, I think, serve the Scriptural requirement. As to the question of drawing water from such a well, a part of the three principal ceremonies performed at a Fire Temple is known as that of *Jor-melavvi* ( lit. to unite the Zaothra or ceremonial water with its source). As we speak of ' dust to dust,' *i. e.*, one born from dust is in the end reduced to dust, this part of the ceremonial which symbolizes the circulation of water from the earth to the air and from the air to the earth requires what we may, on a similar analogy, speak of as the transference of ' water to water.' It requires that a part of the water drawn for ceremonial purposes from the well must be in the end returned to its source—the well. So, the provision of the air-pump, will not, I am afraid, meet all the requirements. I would therefore suggest that in addition to the hand-pump, a small close-fitting opening, also made of wire-gauze of fine mesh, may be provided."

Shams-ul-ulma Darab Dastur Peshotan Sanjana also gave his opinion to the same effect and the recommendation of these two scholars was accepted by the Department.

No Hindu *savant* appears to have been consulted on the subject, but a few gems selected from the petitions and protests received by the Municipal authorities will throw some light on the traditions and customs of the different Hindu sects. In a letter to the Standing Committee the Trustees of the Derasar Sadharan Funds of the temple of Shri Anantnathji Maharaj represented that according to the scriptures of the Jains water used for religious ceremonies " must be drawn *at one stretch* from a well over which the rays of the sun and the light of the moon fall constantly and which must therefore be open to the sky and no other water could be used at such ceremonies."

In another letter to the Committee Messrs. Payne & Co., Solicitors, wrote on behalf of their client Mr. Kikabhoy Premchand: " Our client is a staunch Hindu of old idea and he requires the

use of water from *seven* wells for religious ceremonies. For this purpose he uses the two wells in question and has to go to neighbouring properties to make up the full number of seven wells. Water drawn by means of a pump cannot be used for religious purposes and it is absolutely necessary that both the wells should be provided with trap-doors."

Even a trap-door would not satisfy the scruples of a large number. Messrs. Mehta, Dalpatram and Laljee, Solicitors, represented that the Marjadis never used pipe water, and they observed: "According to the Marjadi principles if any pot containing water touches any part of the trap-door, the water cannot be used for any purpose and the pot must be placed in fire and purified before it can be used again. As, however, it is exceedingly difficult whilst drawing water to prevent the vessel from coming into contact with the trap-door, the provision of such door instead of being a convenience is the cause of much needless irritation and annoyance."

Mr. Goculdas Damodar went a step further and urged that his Marjadi tenants "were drawing water out of the well only in sackcloth buckets and any other means would conflict with their religious scruples."

Mr. Sunderrao D. Navalkar raised a further objection. "By asking me to cover the well," wrote he, "you will be interfering in our religious ceremony of lighting a lamp in the niche in the well and performing other ceremonies regarding it."

The least objectionable expedient for protecting wells from the malarial mosquito was to stock them with fish. In many cases it was cheerfully resorted to as an experimental measure for killing the larvæ. But even this simple remedy was not acceptable to some. In objecting to it a member of the Jain community submitted that the fish would devour the larvæ and that it was against his religion to do any harm to insect life. It, however, required no very great efforts of casuistry to induce him to believe that it would be no transgression on

*his* part if he merely allowed the Department to put the fish into the well.

This incident reminds one of the beliefs current among the great unwashed sect of the Jains known as the *Dhundhias*. These tender-hearted people consider it a sin to wash, as water used for bathing or washing purposes is likely to destroy the germs in it. India is indeed a country of bewildering paradoxes. The Hindu *Shastras* enjoin a complete bath not merely if one happens to touch any untouchable thing or person, but even if one's ears are assailed by the voice of a non-Hindu (*Yavana*). Nevertheless, in this bath-ridden country of religious impressionability and, what may appear to the western people, hyperbolic piety, people like the *Dhundhias* abound. There are also certain Banias who, during the whole of the winter, consider it useless to have anything to do with water beyond washing their hands and face.[1]

With this practice of abstinence from washing may be compared the custom prevailing all over Greece of refraining from washing during the days of the Drymais. No washing is done there during those days because the Drymais, the evil spirits of the waters, are supposed to be then reigning.

Let us now turn from these quaint religious customs concerning the use of well water to some of the beliefs of the people in the existence of spirits residing in the wells of Bombay.

[1] Journal of the Anthropological Society of Bombay. Paper on the Cult of the Bath by Mr. K. M. Jhaveri, Vol. IX.

## CHAPTER II.

## WATER SAINTS.

When owners of houses are asked to fill up their wells or to cover them, they generally apply for permission to provide a wire-gauze cover or a trap-door. In not a few of these cases the application is prompted either by a desire "to enable the spirits in the well to come out," or by the fear "lest the spirits should bring disaster" if they were absolutely shut up.

Mr. Gamanlal F. Dalal, Solicitor, once wrote on behalf of a client, regarding his well in Khetwadi Main Road :—

"My client and his family believe that there is a saintly being in the well and they always personally see the angelic form of the said being moving in the compound at night and they always worship the said being in the well, and they have a bitter experience of filling the well or closing it up hermetically because in or about the year 1902 my client did actually fill up the well to its top but on the very night on which it was so filled up all the members of my client's family fell dangerously ill and got a dream that unless the well was again re-opened and kept open to the sky, they would never recover. The very next day thereafter they had again to dig out the earth with which the well had been filled up and they only recovered when the well was completely opened to the sky."

A Parsi gentleman, who owns a house on Falkland Road, was served with a notice to hermetically cover the well. He complied with the requisition. After about a month he went to Dr. K. B. Shroff, Special Officer, Malaria, complaining that he had lost his son and that he had himself been suffering from palpitation of the heart. This he attributed to the closing of the well.

Similarly, a Parsi lady in Wanka Moholla, Dhobi Talao, informed Dr. Shroff that since the closing of the well in her house her husband had been constantly getting ill. Likewise, a Parsi gentleman living in the same locality complained that he was struck with paralysis for having sealed his well hermetically.

These spirits are believed to influence not only the health and strength of their victims but also their fortunes. In Edwardes Theatre on Kalbadevi Road there was a well, which was filled in by its considerate owner of his own accord during the construction of the building. Subsequently, the owner went to the Malaria Officer and informed him that no Indian Theatrical Company would have his theatre as the proprietors had a sentimental objection pertaining to the well, and that it was believed that European Companies also did not make any profit, as the spirit in the well had been playing mischief. He therefore applied for permission to re-open the well, promising at the same time that he would cover it over again so as to let the spirit have "a free play in the water." This request was granted and the work was carried out accordingly. "Recently I was informed," says Dr. Shroff, "that the theatre was doing better."

Sometimes the pent-up spirits are not so vindictive. Instead of ruining the owners of the wells in which they are shut up, they vent their ire by merely breaking open the barriers. A Parsi lady in Cowasji Patel Street, Fort, owned a large well about 25 to 30 feet in diameter. The Departmental deities ordered that the well should be covered over. After half the work of covering the well had been done, the concrete gave way. The lady went running to the Malaria Officer urging that that was the result of offending the presiding spirit of the well and imploring him to cancel the requisition.[1] The Malaria

[1] With this incident may be compared the English traditions concerning the preservation of the holy wells of England, *vide* page 75.

Officer, however, remained unmoved by the fear of rousing the ire of the water wraith and the dejected lady left his house greatly incensed and probably firmly convinced that the wrath of the spirit would soon be visited on that callous Officer. He is, however, still hale and hearty. What he did to appease the spirit or what amulet he wears to charm the water-goblins away, is not known. However, this much is certain, that he has not escaped the furious cannon-fire of all the well-worshippers in Bombay during the last four years.

Whatever may be the attitude of hardened scientists in this matter, there is no doubt that these well-spirits are everywhere held by the people in great reverence and awe. Whether one believes in their existence, or is inclined to be sceptical on that point, wells supposed to harbour spirits are scrupulously left undisturbed. Mr. Rustomji Byramji Jeejeebhoy, whose family is known both for munificence and culture, wrote in the following terms with regard to a well in Alice Building, Hornby Road:—

"There is a superstition connected with the well. It is well-known all over this part of the town that the well is said to be a sacred well and much sanctity is attached to it. Out of deference to this superstition, I had in designing Alice Building to so design it as to leave the well alone. To me personally the well is of no use, but those who believe in the superstition come and pray near the well and present offerings of flowers and cocoanuts to it."

Not only owners of wells but also building contractors are averse to disturbing water-spirits. When the Parsi contractor who built the Alice Buildings had done work worth about Rs. 35,000, he was informed that it had been proposed that the well had better be filled up. He said he was prepared to give up the work and forego all his claims rather than lay irreverent hands on that sacred well.

Once you instal a natural object in the position of a deity, the idea that the deified power demands offerings and can be easily cajoled invariably follows, probably based on the conviction that every man has his price! Offerings to well-spirits are, therefore, believed to insure good luck and to avert calamities. One day a Parsi lady went to Dr. Shroff in great excitement and begged of him not to insist on the well of her house in Charni Road being closed. The well, she urged, was held in great reverence by people of all communities. Only the day previous, while she was driving in a carriage to the house to offer a cocoanut, sugar and flowers to the well, she narrowly escaped a serious accident, thanks to the protection offered by the well-spirit.

Two sisters owned a house in Dhunji Street near Pydhowni. They were served with a notice to cover the well of the house. One of the sisters went running to the Malaria Officer beseeching him to cancel the notice. She said that her invalid sister strongly believed in the efficacy of the worship of the well and never went to bed without worshipping it and offering it flowers. "My poor sister would simply go mad if she sees the well covered over," she cried, and she would not leave Dr. Shroff's office until that unchivalrous officer left her alone and slipped into another room.

Several wells are believed to harbour spirits possessing occult powers and faculties for giving omens. One such oracular well may be seen in Ghoga Street, Fort. The owner of the house, a Parsi, was allowed, in the first instance, to stock the well with fish so as to clear it of the malaria mosquitoes. This, however, failed to give satisfactory results and there was no alternative but to demand a covering. The owner on the other hand pleaded that the well had been held in great veneration by all classes of people and had so high a reputation for divination that many persons visited it at midnight to "enquire about their wishes." "About eight to twelve ladies (of whom

none should be a widow) stand surrounding the well at midnight and ask questions. If any good is going to happen, fire will be seen on the surface of the water." The owner assured Dr. Shroff that he himself had been an eye-witness to these phenomena.

Indian folklore abounds in stories belonging to the same group. Neither are such stories unknown to the European folklorist. We shall notice in due course several oracular and wishing wells in India and other countries, but the ceremony described by the Parsi owner is purely local and typical. So far as I have been able to ascertain, there is no parallel for it in the literature of well-worship. Peculiar also is the hour fixed for the ceremony. Generally, visiting wells in the midnight or even midday is believed to bring disasters. It seems, however, from an account of a rite described by Miss Burne in Shropshire Folklore that anyone wishing to resort to St. Oswall's Well at Oswestry had also to go to the well at midnight. The ceremony was of course different. It simply required that the votary had to take some water up in the hand and drink part of it, at the same time forming a wish in the mind, and to throw the rest of the water upon a particular stone at the back of the well. If he succeeded in throwing all the water left in his hand upon that stone without touching any other spot, his wish would be fulfilled.

## CHAPTER III.

## PENALTY FOR DEFILEMENT.

A tenant of the same house in Ghoga Street informed Dr. Shroff that a cooly spat on the pavement surrounding the oracular well with the result that he died instantly on the spot for having defiled the holy ground. This reminds me of a story related to me about three years ago of a European girl who took suddenly ill and died within a day or two after she had kicked aside a stone kept near the pavement of a well in Loveji Castle at Parel. On this stone people used to put their offerings to the saintly spirit of the place known by the name of Kaffri Bawa. Many are the stories I have heard of this spirit from a lady who spent her youth in Loveji Castle, but as this was a tree-spirit and not a well-spirit, those tales would be out of place here.

As well-water is used for religious ceremonies, wells and their surroundings are generally kept clean by the Parsis and Hindus alike, but there is a further incentive to cleanliness in the case of wells which are regarded as dwelling-places of spirits. It is a common conviction that any act of defilement, whether conscious or unconscious, offends the spirits and all sorts of calamities are attributed to such acts. At the junction of Ghoga Street and Cowasjee Patel Street stands the once famous house of Nowroji Wadia. Some years ago the property changed hands. Certain alterations were made in the building and in consequence a place was set apart close to the well for keeping dead bodies before disposal. This brought disasters after disasters. Deaths after deaths took place in the house and bereavements after bereavements ruined the owner's family. Too late in the day was it realized that the nymphs living in the well should not have been thus insulted. Once a well in Barber Lane overflowed for days together, emitting

foul water. It did not occur to anyone to ascribe this to the sewer-sprite who had just commenced his pranks in Bombay. Instead, the mischief was unanimously fathered on a Parsi cook and his wife who used to sleep near the parapet of the well.

From ancient times contiguity of a corpse to water has been regarded as a source of defilement. In "Primitive Semitic Religion To-day" (1902), Professor Samuel Curtiss says that he was told by Abdul Khalil, Syrian Protestant teacher at Damascus, that "if a corpse passes by a house, the common people pour the water out from the jars." With this idea of pollution of water was blended the conviction that the defilement of the water of a well or spring was tantamount to the defilement of the spirits or saints residing near them. Once two sects of Mahomedans in Damascus fell out. One section held the other responsible for the displeasure of a saint on the ground that it had performed certain ablutions in the courtyard of his shrine and that "the dirt had come on the saint to his disgust."

In Brittany it is still a popular belief that those who pollute wells by throwing into them rubbish or stones will perish by lightning.[1] In the prologue to *Chrétiens Conte du Graal* there is an account, seemingly very ancient, of how dishonour to the divinities of wells and springs brought destruction on the rich land of Logres. The damsels who resided in these watery places fed travellers with nourishing food until King Amangons wronged one of them by carrying off her golden cup. His men followed his evil example, so that the springs dried up, the grass withered, and the land became waste.[2]

Before the well of Nowroji Wadia's house was unwittingly defiled, the presiding fairies of the well used to sing and play in it, but this entertainment ceased after the place had been

[1] The Athenæum, August 26th 1893.

[2] Evans Wentz: The Fairy Faith in Celtic Countries.

polluted. Another well, famous for the concerts of the nymphs, was a well belonging to the Baxter family in Bhattiawad. There, too, the water damsels regaled the ears of the inmates with music. I say this on the authority of an old lady who used to enjoy those subterranean melodies.

There is a fountain called "the pure one," in Egypt. If anyone that is impure through pollution or menstruation touches the water, it begins at once to stink, and does not cease until one pours out the water of the fountain and cleans it. Then only it regains its fine smell.

Akin to this tradition is the Esthonian belief concerning the sanctity of water. In Esthonia there is a stream Wohhanda which has long been the object of reverence. No Esthonian would fell any tree that grew on its banks or break any reed that fringed its watercourse. If he did, he would die within the year. The brook was purified periodically and it was believed that if dirt was thrown into it, bad weather would follow. The river-god resident in the stream was in the habit of occasionally rising out of it and those who saw him described him as a little man in blue and yellow stockings. Like other river wraiths, whom we shall accost later, this water-sprite also demanded human sacrifices, and tradition records offerings of little children made to Wohhanda.[1] When a German landowner ventured to build a mill and dishonour the water, bad seasons followed year after year, and the country-people burned down the abominable thing.

A strange variant of the popular belief concerning pollution of wells is found in the curious custom of deliberately defiling wells with the object of disturbing the water-spirit and thus compelling him to produce rain. It was a common belief among several nations that one of the ways of constraining the rain-god was to disturb him in his haunts. Thus when rain was long coming in the Canary Islands, the priestesses used

[1] Latham: Descriptive Ethnology.

to beat the sea with rods to punish the water-spirit for his niggardliness. In the same way the Dards, one of the tribes of the *Hindu-Kush*, believe that if a cow-skin or anything impure is placed in certain springs, storm will follow. In the mountains of Farghana there was a place where it began to rain as soon as anything dirty was thrown into a famous well. In his famous work on the Chronology of Ancient Nations, *Athár-ul-Bakiya*, Albiruni refers to this phenomenon and asks for an explanation. "And how," he inquires, "do you account for the place called "the shop of *Solomon*, the son of David," in the cave called Ispahbadhan in the mountain of Tâk in Tabaristan, where heaven becomes cloudy as soon as you defile it by filth or by milk, and where it rains until you clean it again? And how do you account for the mountain in the country of the Turks? For if the sheep pass over it, people wrap their feet in wool to prevent their touching the rock of the mountain. For if they touch it, heavy rain immediately follows." These things, says the author, are natural peculiarities of the created beings, the causes of which are to be traced back to the simple elements and to the beginning of all composition and creation. "And there is no possibility that our knowledge should ever penetrate to subjects of this description."

This doctrine of negation of knowledge is typical of Persian poets and philosophers. The poet Fakhra Razi has beautifully expressed the idea in the following words:—"I thought and thought each night and morn for seventy years and two, but came to know this, that nothing can be known."

# CHAPTER IV.

## QUAINT PARSI BELIEFS.

Close by Naoroji Wadia's house was another habitat of spirits. The owner of the house, a Parsi lady, was asked to cover it. In view of the sad experience of the fate of the owner of the neighbouring house she was reluctant to do anything that might offend the spirits, but the Malaria Department was insistent. She therefore first implored the presiding deities of the well to forgive her as she had no option in the matter, and then consented to cover the well provided a wire-gauze trap-door was allowed so as not to interfere with the work of worship. I understand that on every full moon eve she opens the trap-door, garlands the well and offers her *puja* there.

Further down the same street, once renowned for the abodes of Parsi *Shethias*, is a house belonging to a well-known Parsi family. A well in this house was and still is most devoutly worshipped by the inmates of the house. I hear from a very reliable source that whenever any member of the family got married, it was the practice to sacrifice a goat to the well-spirit, to dip a finger in the blood of the victim and to anoint the bride or bridegroom on the forehead with a mark of the blood. Once however this ceremony was overlooked and, as fate would have it, the bridegroom died within forty days.

This practice of besmearing the forehead with the blood of the sacrifice is a survival of primitive ideas concerning blood-shedding and blood-sprinkling, the taking of the blood from the place where the sacrifice was given being regarded as equivalent to taking the blessing of the place and putting it on the person anointed with the blood. Thus when an Arab matron slaughters a goat or a sheep vowed in her son's behalf, she takes some of the blood and puts it on his skin.

Similarly, when a barren couple that has promised a sacrifice to a saint in return for a child is blest with the joys of parenthood, the sacrifice is given and the blood of the animal is put *on the forehead* of the child.

Remarkable as is the survival of this primitive ritual in Bombay and its prevalence amongst people such as the Parsis, there is nothing very extraordinary about it. A little patch of savagery as it appears to be in the midst of fair fields and pastures new of western culture, it merely affords an illustration of the fact that localities preserve relics of a people much older than those who now inhabit them. It also shows that various systems of local fetichism found in Aryan Countries merely represent the undying beliefs and customs of a primitive race which the Aryans eventually incorporated into their own beliefs and rituals, for it will be seen as we proceed that in India as in Great Britain the entire cult of well-worship was imbibed rather than engendered by Aryan culture.

What, however, is most extraordinary is that of all the communities in Bombay the Parsis show the greatest susceptibility to these beliefs. Amongst the Hindus worship of water is, no doubt, universal. Belief in spirits is also general amongst them. Amongst these spirits there are water-goblins also, *Jalachar*, as contrasted with *Bhuchar*, spirits hovering on earth, mostly inimical, *mâtâs* and *sankhinis*, *bhuts*, and *prets* who hover round wells and tanks, particularly the wayside ones, and drown or enter the persons of those who go near their haunts. Many of these goblins are the spirits of those who have met with an accidental death or the souls that have not received the funeral *pindas* with the proper obsequies. The Hindus believe that these fallen souls reside in their *avagati*, or degraded condition, near the scene of their death and molest those who approach it Almost all the old wells in the Maidan were in this way believed to be the haunts of such spirits who claimed their annual toll without fail. Thus it was believed that

the well that stood in the rear of the Bombay Gymkhana must needs have at least three victims, and sure enough there were at least three cases of suicide in that well during a year! However, so far as domestic well-spirits are concerned, while almost all the wells of a Parsi house were until recently and many of them still are under the protection of a *Bawa*, or *Sayyid*, or *Pir*, or *Jinn*, or *Pari*, or other spirits, one rarely comes across such wells in Hindu household. Wells are worshipped by the Hindus no doubt, without exception, but it is the sacred character of the water that accounts for the worship, not the belief in the existence of well-spirits. Again, as a result of my investigations, I find that the worship of wells amongst the Parsi community is in some cases much ruder and more primitive than amongst the Hindus. What can be the explanation for it? Is it simply a continuation of their own old beliefs in the land of their adoption? Is it merely old wine in new bottles?

Water-worship was, no doubt, a general cult with the Parsis in their ancestral home. Of the antiquity of this worship amongst them we have ample evidence in their scriptures. In the *Aban Yesht* the spring is addressed as a mighty goddess, *Ardevi Sura Anahita*, strong, sublime, spotless, erroneously equated by some authors with the Mylitta of the Babylonians and the Aphrodite of the Greeks. Ahurarmazda calls upon Zarathushtra to worship *Ardevi Sura Anahita* :—

The wide-expanding, the healing,
Foe to the demons, of Ahura's Faith,
Worthy of sacrifice in the material world,
Worthy of prayer in the material world,
Life-increasing, the righteous,
Herd-increasing, the righteous,
Food-increasing, the righteous,
Wealth-increasing, the righteous,
Country-increasing, the righteous.

Who purifies the seed of all males,
Who purifies the womb of
All females for bearing.[1]
Who makes all females have easy childbirth,
Who bestows upon all females
Right (and) timely milk.

All the shores around the Sea Vourukasha
Are in commotion,
The whole middle is bubbling up,
When she flows forth unto them,
When she streams forth unto them,
Ardevi Sura Anahita.

To whom belong a thousand lakes,
To whom a thousand outlets;
Any one of these lakes
And any of these outlets
(Is) a forty days' ride
For a man mounted on a good horse.

Whom I, Ahura Mazda, by movement of tongue
Brought forth for the furtherance of the house,
For the furtherance of the village, town and country.

The chariot of *Banu Ardevi Sura* is drawn by four white horses who baffle all the devils. Ahuramazda is said to have worshipped her in order to secure her assistance in inducing Zarathushtra to become his prophet, and the example set by Him was followed by the great kings and heroes of ancient Iran. It is conceivable that this tribal cult accompanied the devout descendants of the ancient Persians wherever they went and that with their mind attuned to the worship of water they readily came under the influence of the *genii locorum* in the

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[1] The Zoroastrian month *Aban* named after *Ardevi Sura Anahita* coincided for the most part with February, which is named after Juno, derived from the Sabine word *Februs*, to purify. Juno also presided over the ceremony of purification of women.

different parts of this country and adopted some of the local rituals of the people who resided there before them. But the question then arises, who were the people from whom they borrowed these beliefs and rituals? Most of the guardian angels of their wells point to a Mahomedan origin, and yet amongst the followers of Islam well-worship is conspicuous by its absence. They have, no doubt, their *Sayyids* and *Pirs* in abundance, almost every shrine of theirs has its presiding saint, but they scarcely believe in any spirit residing in wells. In fact, one may safely say that well-worship amongst these people has died out, if ever it did exist before. During my investigation I have not come across a single case of such worship amongst them and all the Mahomedans whom I have consulted testify to the absence of these beliefs among them. How then, do we account for the Mahomedan patron saints of the wells of Parsi houses? It clearly cannot be a case of preservation of old wine in new jars. The intensely local colouring does not warrant any such assumption. There are distinctly non-Parsi ingredients in it. From whom and how did they get these? Well-spirits, like tree-spirits, form no part of any tribal cult. They are essentially local in nature and the subject needs careful research in the localisation of beliefs and the genealogy of folklore. We shall advert to this subject again,[1] meanwhile let us record a few more instances of sanctified wells in Bombay.

A well of which I heard during my childhood several thrilling stories of a somewhat singular type was situated in a house in Nanabhoy Lane, Fort, opposite the Banaji Fire-Temple, which belonged to my great grand-mother. It was believed to be the abode of a kind-hearted *Sayyid* (Mahomedan saint) who used to watch the health and fortunes of the inmates of the house. Women in labour preferred for confinement no other place to this auspicious house always mercifully protected by that guardian angel. It is said that he used to come out

[1] *Vide* rt II, chapter XIII.

of the well regularly and that his presence was known by the ecstatic possession of a Parsi woman who used to live on the ground floor. A big basin of *maleeda* (confection of wheat flour) was offered to him by the ladies. It was emptied in a few moments. The inmates of the house related to the saint all their difficulties and each one got a soothing reply and friendly hints through the lips of the medium. A young lady used to suffer from constant headache. Her grand-mother one day asked the *Sayyid* what to do to cure the ailment. He gave her a betel-nut and told her that it should always be kept by the girl with her. This was done and she never suffered from headache again. An old inmate of the house was once seriously ill. All hopes of recovery were abandoned, but the saint came to his rescue and advised the relatives as to what they should do to propitiate the sea furies who wanted to devour the man. After the furies were propitiated as advised, the man recovered.

One or two more stories of Bombay wells known after the names of the saintly spirits residing in them may be noted. The Gunbow Lane is known after the famous well in the locality. It is generally believed that the well was sacred to the Saint (*bâwâ*) Gun who resorted to it. The Bombay City Gazeteer, however, informs us that "the curious name *Gunbow* is probably a corruption of *Gunba*, the name of an ancestor of Mr. Jagannath Shankersett." Old records show that Gunba Seti or Gunba Shet settled in Bombay during the first quarter of the 18th century and founded a mercantile firm within the Fort walls. This Gunbow well was so big that it was believed that a man could swim from its bottom to another in the compound of the Manockji Seth Wadi about 500 feet away. Report has it that swimmers even used to find their way as far as the wells on the Maidan beyond Hornby Road. When it was proposed to fill in the well, strong representations were made to the effect that an opening for the well spirit should be kept, and a portion was left open for years. This too has been now

covered over, but people still take their offerings to the site. In the same way, a well in the lane by the side of the Manockji Seth's Agiary leading to Mint Road, which has been covered over, is seen strewn with flowers and other offerings.

Another well in Ghoga Street was believed to be the dwelling place of a Mahomedan saint, *Murgha Bawa*. "Murgha" is believed to be a corruption of Yusuf Murgay, who owned houses in the street which was also known after his name as *Murgha Sheri*. An esteemed friend, who used to reside in the house containing this well, tells me that the well was held in great reverence by the Parsi families residing in the locality. Various offerings were made, the principal of which was a black *murgha* or fowl, the common victim of such sacrifices. It was believed that in the still hours of the night the saint used to come out of the well and move about in the house. His steps were heard distinctly on the staircase and his presence was announced by the creaking sound that was heard round about. But my friend, who used to burn midnight oil in that house during his college days and who has since been wedded to science, is inclined to think that the footsteps were those of the rats infesting the house and that the creaking sound was made by the wooden book-cases!

A Parsi lady who lived in the same house says that people from various parts of the town used to take offerings to the spirit of the well, amongst which were big *thalis* (trays) of sweetmeat. Children were asked not to touch these, but this young lady freely helped herself to those sweets. Another friend, who took similar liberties with the offerings, was Mr. Jamsetji Nadirshaw. He used to live in Mapla's house in old Modikhana. The well of this house was adored by people and young Jamsetji pilfered a lot of sweets offered to the gods. Sir Dinsha Edulji Wacha, who lived in the house during his childhood, informs me that his mother and grand-mother used to tell him many a thrilling story of the queer ways in which the guardian spirit of the well used to divert them.

A friend living in Karwar Street (Modi Khana) says that the well of his house is sacred to a Mahomedan *pir* and that to this day vows are offered to the saint and his blessings sought whenever the tenants are in difficulty. On the full moon day the well is decorated with flowers and the saint is implored to cure cases of illness which defy the doctor's skill. Needless to say, these offerings and prayers are speedily followed by the recovery of the patients.

Another well in Parsi Bazar Street is also believed to harbour a beneficent *pir*. Only four years ago, a friend was informed that when doctors despaired of curing a patient, a Parsi carpenter suggested that the well spirit should be implored to save the patient. He brought certain people versed in the art of propitiating spirits and asked them to try their skill. They gratified the well-spirit by placing grain and other offerings on the surface of the water and by remaining in the water for days together, muttering incantations. The patient was thoroughly cured and, no wonder, he attributes the cure to the grace of the water saint.

These folk beliefs in the efficacy of well-water and the influence of the spirits dwelling in it are, as already observed, in no way peculiar to the City of Bombay or to other parts of the country of India and present no new phase of human thought. They are common to the whole world. In the concept of primeval man everything had its spirit. Particularly did it associate life with motion. The spring was ever flowing, ever bountiful, ever refreshing and fertilizing and came to be regarded as a living organism, a benevolent spirit supplying man with the prime necessity of life and endowed with purifying and healing qualities. Everywhere, therefore, the source of this quickening element that had such charms came to be adored so that the water-worship in the East has its striking counterpart in the history of Western thought.

Professor Robertson Smith identifies well worship with the agricultural life of aborigines who had not yet developed the idea of a heavenly God. This is his description of the worship prevailing in Arabia: "The fountain is treated as a living thing, those properties of its waters which we call natural are regarded as manifestations of a divine life, and the source itself is honoured as a divine being, I had almost said a divine animal."[1] "This pregnant summary of well-worship in Arabia," says Sir Laurence Gomme in his *Ethnology of Folklore*, "may, without the alteration of a single word, be adopted as the summary of well-worship in Britain and its isles." One might even say that well-worship is probably more wide-spread in the West than in the East and that some of the rituals there observed are more primitive than those which distinguish it in the East.

[1] *The Religion of the Semites.*

# PART II

## WATER-WORSHIP IN EAST AND WEST




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# CHAPTER V

## THE MOST WIDE-SPREAD PHASE OF ANIMISM

We have seen that water-worship was a cult of hoary antiquity. The belief that every locality has its presiding genius gave rise to the deification of fountains and rivers just as it led to the deification of hills and trees and other phases of animism. The emphasis of animism lies in its localisation, in the local spirits which, to quote Tylor's words, belong to mountain and rock and valley, to well and stream and lake, in brief, to those natural objects which in early ages aroused the savage mind to mythological ideas.[1] Some localities may not have in their midst such weird places as mountains and rivers, groves and forests, but scarcely any district is devoid of a well or a pool of water. Of all nature-worship, therefore, well-worship is the most wide-spread. Just the same scenes as one witnesses to-day at wells and tanks in India were beheld for ages in other parts of the world. Just the same stories as one hears to-day of the mysterious ways and powers of water-spirits were everywhere heard before. We have already seen that it was a general cult with the ancient Iranians and with the help of Professor Robertson Smith and Professor Curtiss we have also noticed how in Arabia the fountain was treated as a living thing and the source itself honoured as a divine being.

Max Muller, however, puts a different construction on the deification of natural objects. He points out that it is in India more than anywhere else that animism has been made to disclose its secret cause, namely, the necessity of deriving all appellative nouns from roots necessarily expressive, as Noire has shown, of action, so that, whether we like it or not, the sun whether called Svar or Vishnu, bull, swan or any other name, becomes *ipso nomine* an agent, the shiner or the wanderer, the strong man,

[1] Tylor : Primitive Culture, Vol. II.

the swift bird. By the same process the wind is the blower, the night the calmer, the moon, Soma, the rainer. What is classed as animism in ancient Aryan mythology, he observes, is often no more than a poetical conception of nature which enables the poets to address the sun and moon, and rivers and trees as if they could hear and understand his words. "Sometimes however," he continues, "what is called animism is a superstition which after having recognised agents in sun and moon, rivers and trees, postulates on the strength of analogy the existence of agents or spirits dwelling in other parts of nature also, haunting our houses, bringing misfortunes upon us, though sometimes conferring blessings also." It lies beyond the scope of this work to enter into any discussion of this theory, but we shall see as we proceed that the theory of poetic personification does not harmonize with the myriad details of folklore of wells and springs.

One might be inclined to attribute the worship of water to the great economic value which water possesses in the hot and dry regions of the east where wells and springs are veritable assets of the people, the most precious gifts of the gods. But it was not in arid lands only that wells received divine honour. There is ample evidence to show that people inhabiting lands rich in springs and fountains also held them sacred and worshipped the divine beings under whose protection the streams flowed bubbling across their fields. It would seem, therefore, that the spiritual element has been the uppermost in the worship of water. It was in view of the religious awe in which the Greeks held rivers that they raised their prayers to the springs, as may be gathered from the prayers offered by Odysseus to the river after his vicissitudes in the deep and from the description given by Homer in the *Iliad* of the sacrifice offered at flowing springs.

According to the Old Testament water was an important factor during the first three days of Creation. On the first day "the spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters"; on the

second day the nether waters were divided from the upper, and the latter were transformed into the "rakia" or "firmament"; and on the third day the nether waters were assigned to their allotted place, which received the name of "sea." The Gnostics regarded water as the original element and through their influence and the influence of the Greeks similar beliefs gained currency among the Jews, so that Judah ben Pazi transmitted the following saying in the name of R. Ismael: "In the beginning the world consisted of water within water; the water was then changed into ice and again transformed by God into earth. The earth itself, however, rests upon the waters, and the waters on the mountains" (*i.e.* the clouds).[1]

Nature withheld stone and wood from the Babylonian, but bestowed upon him by way of compensation another invaluable gift —the sea and the rivers. The Babylonian fully realized its value as an incentive to civilization. In his work on the *Evolution of the Aryan* Rudolph von Ibering points out that in his conception of the God Nun the Babylonian personified the idea that water was the source of all life, that historically the earth came forth from the water as well as that water was the source of all blessing, the quickening element of creation. Indeed, in Mesopotamia more than anywhere else one could vividly realize the fact that the inhabited soil had once formed the bottom of the sea and had become dry land through the retreat of the waters. In Egypt Shu, the air, rises from water which existed before the gods and goddesses some of whom like Vishnu, Vira-Kocha and Aphrodite, have actually sprung from waters. In the Quran Lord Almighty says: "We clave the heavens and earth asunder, and by means of water, we gave life to everything." This is also one of the Ebionite doctrines. The Akkad triad of gods was formed of Ea, the ocean-god, who was also known as "the lord of the earth" with Na, the Sky, and Mul-ge, the lord of the underworld. They had no local water-deities, but from the earliest times we come across two stages of development of one central

[1] Jewish Encyclopædia.

idea—the conception of the natural element as an animated being itself and the separation of its animating fetish-soul as a distinct spiritual deity. In the *Land of the Hittites* Garstang says that the Hittites seem to have absorbed into their pantheon a number of acceptable nature-cults, like the worship of mountains and streams and of the mother-goddess of earth, already practised by an earlier population whom they overlaid. In the history of Polybius is recorded an oath made by Hannibal to Philip of Macedon containing two triads sacred to the Phœnicians: "Sun, Moon and Earth"; "Rivers, Meadows and Waters."

In the Puranas the Vedic God Varuna is the "lord of the waters." He rides on the Makara, half crocodile, half fish, rules the soft west winds and controls the salt seas and the "seminal principle."[1] The noose of Varuna is called the Nâgapâsa, or snake-noose, from which the wicked cannot escape. Every twinkle of man's eyes and his inward thoughts are known to Varuna. "He sees as if he were always near: none can flee from his presence, nor be rid of Varuna. If we flee beyond the sky, he is there; he knows our uprising and lying down." Originally Mithra and Varuna were merely the names for day and night and it is interesting to note how the conception of the night served to convey the idea of the ocean. "The night," says Kunte,[2] "presents the phenomenon of an expanse which resembles that of the ocean in colour, in extent, in depth, and in undulating motion. Hence the idea of the one naturally expressed the idea of the other. The god of night became the god of waters." The same author thus sums up the different stages of the development of the idea of Varuna:

1. Varuna, darkness or night and one possessed of meshes.
2. Varuna, ocean or firmament.
3. Varuna, lord of waters.
4. One who aided sailors, a beneficent god.

[1] Max Muller: History of Ancient Sanskrit Literature.
[2] The Vicissitudes of Aryan Civilization in India.

Turning to the classic world, we find that the early Greeks, like the Babylonians, regarded the ocean as a broad river surrounding the earth, the abode whence spirits came, and to which they returned, and so a "river of life and death." They called Okeanos, the ocean, the son of heaven and earth, and his wife was Tēhtis, or Tēthus; together they were the parents of all waters.

"To the great Olympian assembly in the halls of cloud-compelling Zeus came the Rivers, all save Ocean, and thither came the nymphs who dwell in lovely groves and at the springs of streams, and in the grassy meads; and they sate upon the polished seats. Even against Hephaistos, the Fire-god, a River-god dared to stand opposed, deep-eddying Xanthos, called of men Skamandros. He rushed down to overwhelm Achilles and bury him in sand and slime, and though Hephaistos prevailed against him with his flames, and forced him, with the fish skurrying hither and thither in his boiling waves and the willows scorched upon his banks, to rush on no more but stand, yet at the word of white-armed Here, that it was not fit for mortals' sake to handle so roughly an immortal god, Hephaistos quenched his furious fire, and the returning flood sped again along his channel."

Neptune was the Latin Sea-god, "the lord of dwelling waves." When Kleomenes marched down to Thyrea, having slaughtered a bull to the sea, he embarked his army in ships for the Tirynthian land and Nauplia. Cicero makes Cotta remark to Balbus that "our generals, embarking on the sea, have been accustomed to immolate a victim to the waves," and he goes on to argue that if the Earth herself is a goddess she is no other than Tellus and if the earth, the sea too referred to by Balbus as Neptune. Here, says Tylor[1], is direct nature-worship in its extremest sense of fetish-worship. But in the anthropomorphic stage appear that dim pre-Olympian figure of Nēreus, the Old Man of the Sea, father of the Nereids in their ocean-caves, and the Homeric

[1] Primitive Culture, Vol. II.

Poseidon, the Earth-shaker, "who stables his coursers in his cave in the Ægean deeps, who harnesses the gold-maned steeds to his chariot and drives through the dividing waves, while the subject sea-beasts come up at the passing of their lord, a king so little bound to the element he governs, that he can come from the brine to sit in the midst of the gods in the assembly on Olympos, and ask the will of Zeus."

The third greatest god of the Scandinavians was Niörd, born in Vanaheim (the water home), and living among sailors in Noatun (ship town) ruling the winds, and sea, and quenching the fires of day in his waves. To the Vanir, or sea folk, he was the "rich and beneficent one," and his children were Frey and Freya. Skadi, "the scathing one", daughter of Thiassi the giant god of land, took him as her husband, but land and water did not long agree. His consort is also Nerthus, the earth-goddess of Rugen, called by the Germans, the iron lady.

Japan deifies separately on land and at sea the lords of the waters. Midsuno Kami, the water-god, is worshipped during the rainy season and Jebisu, the sea-god, is younger brother of the Sun to whom the Japanese offer cloth, rice and bottles of rum, just as the Greek sacrificed a bull to Poseidon and the Romans to Neptune, before a voyage. The Peruvian sea-god Virakocha, "foam of the lake" or "of the waters," was often identified with the Creator. Arising from the waters he made the sun and the planets, gave life to stones and created all things.

"It appears from Bosman's account, about 1700," says Tylor, "that in the religion of Whydah, the sea ranked only as younger brother in the three divine orders, below the serpents and trees. But at present, as appears from Captain Burton's evidence, the religion of Whydah extends through Dahowe, and the Divine Sea has risen in rank. The youngest brother of the triad is Hu, the ocean or sea. Formerly, it was subject to chastisement, like the Hellespont, if idle or useless. The Huno, or

ocean priest, is now considered the highest of all, a fetish king, at Whydah, where he has 500 wives. At stated times he repairs to the beach, begs 'Agbwe', the ocean-god, not to be boisterous, and throws in rice and corn, oil and beans, cloth, cowries and other valuables. At times the King sends as an ocean sacrifice from Agbowe a man carried in a hammock, with the dress, the stool, and the umbrella of a caboceer; a canoe takes him out to sea, where he is thrown to the sharks. While in these descriptions the individual divine personality of the sea is so well marked, an account of the closely related slave coast religion states that a great god dwells in the sea, and it is to him, not to the sea itself, that offerings are cast in. In South America the idea of the divine sea is clearly marked in the Peruvian worship of Mamacocha, Mother Sea, giver of food to men."[1]

The Egyptians gratefully recognize how much they owe to the Nile and in their hymns they thank the Nile-god. Statues of the god are painted green and red, representing the colour of the river in June when it is a bright green before the inundation and the ruddy hue when its wells are charged with the red mud brought down from the Abyssinian mountains. We have already noticed that the spring was and is still adored as Lord Almighty's daughter by the Zoroastrians. The Zoroastrian scriptures record how she was worshipped by the Heavenly Father Himself when He wanted her assistance in inducing *Zorathushtra* to become His prophet. Even to this day a festival is held in her honour by the Parsis in Bombay on the tenth day of the eighth month of the Parsi year. This day as well as the month bear the name Aban. The Parsis flock in numbers on this auspicious day to the sea-beach to offer prayers.

Not unlike the Iranians the Greeks also adored their marine goddess Aphrodite, "born in the foam of the sea." Greek folklore tells us how this goddess rose from the sea opposite the island of Cythera. She was also the goddess of love and was in

[1] Primitive Culture, Vol. II.

earlier times regarded as the goddess of domestic life and of the relations between families, being in some places associated with Eileithyia, the goddess of child-birth, or regarded, like Artemis, as a guardian of children and young maidens. Odysseus invoked the river of Scheria, Skamandros had his priest and Sperchcios his grove, and sacrifice was given to the river-god Acheloos, eldest of the three thousand river-children, and old Okeanos.

Greek saints were believed to bestow wells of water endowed with miraculous properties, and frequently on their feast days an extra supply made the wells overflow. The monastery of Plemmyri, in the south-east of Rhodes, possesses a well of this nature. The priest walks round it, offering up certain prayers and sometimes the water rises in answer to his invocation and flows over into the Court. Another such interesting well exists in the Church of the Virgin at Balukli, outside the walls of Constantinople.[1]

Similarly, the Romans had their water-nymph Egeria. Women with child used to offer sacrifices to her, because she was believed to be able, like *Ardevi Sur Anahita* and Diana, to grant them an easy delivery. Every day Roman Vestals fetched water from her spring to wash the temple of Vesta, carrying it in earthenware pitchers on their heads. In his Golden Bough Sir James Frazer observes that the remains of baths which were discovered near that site together with many terra cotta models of various parts of the human body suggest that the waters of Egeria were used to heal the sick who may have signified their hopes or testified their gratitude by dedicating likenesses of the diseased members to the goddess, in accordance with a custom which is still observed in many parts of Europe. Examples of the survival of this custom in modern times are given by Blunt in his *Vestiges of Ancient Manners and Customs in Modern Italy and Sicily*. It is also widespread among the Catholic population in Southern Germany and the Christian

[1] Miss Hamilton : Greek Saints and their Festivals.

missionaries from those parts have brought the custom to India also. Almost every Sunday the Goans and Native Christians of Bombay, for instance, will be seen dedicating likenesses of diseased limbs made of wax to Virgin Mary at Mount Mary's chapel at Bandra in gratitude for the cures effected through her grace. The custom has spread amongst other communities and I have heard of several cases in which Parsi ladies have taken such offerings to the Chapel.

This parallelism of beliefs and catholicity of cures remind one of the faith which not only the Greeks and the Roman Catholics, but the Turks and the Jews had in the miracles wrought by the Greek Saints. The best known instance of this, given by Miss Hamilton in her illuminating work on *Greek Saints and their Festivals*, is the large marble fountain standing in the court of the Panagia's Church at Tenos. It was the gift of a grateful Turk cured, according to his own conviction, by the Panagia of the Christians. To a certain extent a feeling was prevalent against permitting unbelievers to participate in these boons, but it was futile in effect and the cures of infidels continued. Within the Smyrna Cathedral there is a holy well the water of which is specially renowned for the cure of ophthalmia. Turks, along with Greeks, shared in its benefits to an extent which excited the jealousy of the officials and they resolved to give ordinary water in response to the demands of infidels. This stratagem was, however, ineffectual for the eyes of the Turks were cured nevertheless with the unsanctified medium just as thoroughly as with the holy water. This might have shaken the faith of the believers in the holy well, but fortunately for them no such rude awakening appears to have marred their confidence in the miraculous powers of the well or of the saints.

Numerous proofs of water-worship in Great Britain exist to-day. English folklore is full of these and we shall notice them presently. There is also archæological evidence establish

ing the prevalence of the cult. On a pavement at Sydney Park, Gloucestershire, on the western bank of the Severn, has been carved the figure of one of the English river divinities. The principal figure is a youthful deity crowned with rays like Phoebus and standing in a chariot drawn, as in the case of *Banu Ardevi Sur Anahita* of the Iranians, by four horses. Three inscriptions are preserved: (1) Devo Nodenti; (2) D. M. Nodonti and (3) Deo Nudente M. The form Nodens has been identified by Professor Rhys with the Welsh Lludd and with the Irish Nuada. This monumental relic by no means presents the British embodiment of the water-god, the work being Roman it evidently bears the stamp of the Roman interpretation of the British belief in the local god and has been modelled on the Roman standard of the water-god Neptune. The whole find has been fully described and illustrated in a special volume by the Rev. W. H. Bathurst and C. W. King.

In Tylor's *Primitive Culture* we find the following American examples of animistic ideas concerning water. "Who makes this river flow?" asks the Algonquin hunter in a medicine song, and his answer is, "The spirit, he makes this river flow." In any great river, or lake, or cascade, there dwell such spirits, looked upon as mighty manitus. Thus Carver mentions the habit of the Red Indians, when they reached the shores of Lake Superior or the banks of the Mississipi, or any great body of water, to present to the spirit who resides there some kind of offering; this he saw done by a Winnebago chief who went with him to the Falls of St. Anthony. Franklin saw a similar sacrifice made by an Indian, whose wife had been afflicted with sickness by the water-spirits and who accordingly to appease them tied up in a small bundle a knife and a piece of tobacco and some other trifling articles, and committed them to the rapids. On the river-bank the Peruvians would scoop up a handful of water and drink it, praying the river deity to let them cross or to give them some fish, and they threw maize into the stream as a propitiating offering. Even to this day

the Indians of the Cordilleras perform the ceremonial sip before they will pass a river on foot or horseback, just as the Hindus and Parsis throw cocoanuts and flowers and sugar.

Tylor also gives the following African rites of water-worship. In the East, among the Wanika, every spring has its spirit, to which oblations are made. In the West, in the Akra district, lakes, ponds and rivers received worship as local deities. In the South, among the Kafirs, streams are venerated as personal beings, or the abodes of personal deities, as when a man crossing a river will ask leave of its spirit, or having crossed will throw in a stone; or when the dwellers by a stream will sacrifice a beast to it in time of drought, or, warned by illness in the tribe that their river is angry, will cast into it a few handfuls of millet or the entrails of a slaughtered ox. Not less strongly marked, says Tylor, are such ideas among the Tartar races of the north. Thus the Ostyaks venerate the river Ob, and when fish is scanty will hang a stone about a rein-deer's neck and cast it in for a sacrifice. Among the Buraets, who are professing Buddhists, the old worship may still be seen at the picturesque little mountain lake of Ikeougoun, where they come to the wooden temple on the shore to offer sacrifices of milk and butter and the fat of the animals which they burn on the altars.

It is not necessary to overlay this chapter with countless other European and Indian examples. We shall examine these more fully in the subsequent chapters.

# CHAPTER VI

## CHRISTIAN TOLERANCE OF THE CULT OF WATER

Throughout the West the cult of water was flourishing along with the cult of trees and stones when Christianity found its way to Europe. The holy wells which were then plentiful have since changed their names, but a few have still retained their old names. Thus there is or was a spring called Woden's well in Gloucestershire, which supplies water to the moat around Wandswell Court, also a Thor's Well, or Thorskill, in Yorkshire. When the faith and usages of the Celtics and the Anglo-Saxons came in contact with Christianity, together with the still older faiths and customs which the Celt and Teuton had continued or allowed to continue, the new religion did not distinguish between the various shades of beliefs and usages. It merely treated all alike as pagan. Kings, Popes and Church Councils issued edict after edict condemning non-Christian practices. Let us cite some of these. The second Council of Arles, held about the year 452, issued the following canon:

"If in the territory of a bishop infidels light torches or venerate trees, fountains, or stones, and he neglects to abolish this usage, he must know that he is guilty of sacrilege."

King Canute in England and Charlemagne in Europe also conducted vigorous campaigns against these relics of paganism. Here is an extract from Charlemagne's edict:

"With respect to trees, stones, and fountains, where certain foolish people light torches or practise other superstitions, we earnestly ordain that the most evil custom detestable to God, wherever it be found, should be removed and destroyed."

It was too much, however, to hope for the total eradication of those faiths and customs of age-long existence. Pope Gregory was not slow to realize this, as will be seen from the following extract from his famous letter to the Abbot Mellitus in the year 601 :—

> "When, therefore, Almighty God shall bring you to the most reverend Bishop Augustine our Brother, tell him what I have, upon mature deliberation on the affair of the English, determined upon, namely that the temples of the idols (*fana idolorum*) in that nation (*gente*) ought not to be destroyed ; but let the idols that are in them be destroyed ; let holy water be made and sprinkled upon the said temples, let altars be erected and relics placed. For if these temples be well built, it is requisite that they may be converted from the worship of devils (*dæmonum*) to the worship of the true God ; that the nation seeing that their temples are not destroyed may remove error from their hearts, and knowing and adoring the true God may the more familiarly resort to the places to which they have been accustomed. And because they have been used to slaughter many oxen in the sacrifices to devils some solemnity must be exchanged for them on this account, so that on the day of the dedication, or the nativities of the holy martyrs whose relics are there deposited, they may build themselves huts of the boughs of trees about those churches which have been turned to that use from temples and celebrate the solemnity with religious feasting and no more offer beasts to the devil (*diabolo*), but kill cattle to the praise of God in their eating, and return thanks to the giver of all things for their sustenance."

Thus did the early Christian missionaries come to regard the old phase of water-worship tenderly. Adopting what they could not abolish, they blessed the waters of holy wells and

used them for baptism of converts and erected chapels or oratories near by or placed an image of the Virgin, or some saint, near sacred trees and rivers or over holy wells and fountains. Thus did the new faith which aimed in principle at the purity of Christian doctrine permit in practice a continuance of pagan worship under Christian auspices. Curious was the result. Under the transformation of beliefs thus unconsciously wrought the simple-hearted Christians beheld in brilliant images of the virgin and the saints fresh dwelling-places for the presiding deities of the waters whom they and their forefathers had venerated in the past. The belief in the miraculous power of water became linked with the name of *Madonna* or some saintly messenger of God and so enduring was this combination that it gave a new lease of life to the old beliefs.

One by one the old ideas and customs which were firmly rooted in the multitude came to be absorbed into Christianity. A dual system of belief thus sprang up and this is very strikingly reflected in the supplication of an old Scottish peasant when he went to worship at a sacred well:

> "O Lord, Thou knowest that well would it be for me this day an I had stoopit my knees and my heart before Thee in spirit and in truth as often as I have stoopit them after this well. But we maun keep the customs of our fathers."[1]

What is true of well-worship is true of other phases of nature-worship. A vivid picture of the result of the Christian tolerance of paganism has been drawn by Grimm in the preface to the second edition of his Teutonic Mythology. For our present purpose it will suffice to quote from it only two or three sentences which have a direct bearing on the question of water-worship: "Sacred wells and fountains," says he, "were rechristened after saints, to whom their sanctity was transferred. Law usages, particularly the ordeals and oath-takings, but also the beating

[1] Gomme: *Folklore as an Historical Science.*

of bounds, consecrations, image processions, spells and formula while retaining their heathen character, were simply clothed in Christian forms. In some customs there was little to change: the heathen practice of sprinkling a new-born babe with water closely resembled Christian baptism."

This reference to adapted pagan rites in connection with the baptismal ceremony recalls the words in which Mr. Edward Clodd in *Tom Tit Tot* traces the early beginnings of the order of the Christian clergy to a prehistoric past. "The priest who christens the child in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost," says he, "is the lineal descendant, the true apostolic successor of the medicine-man. He may deny the spiritual father who begot him, and vaunt his descent from St. Peter. But the first Bishop of Rome, granting that title to the apostle, was himself a parvenu compared to the barbaric priest who uttered his incantations on the hill now crowned by the Vatican."

"We think with sympathy," continues Mr. Clodd, "of that 'divine honour' which Gildas tells us our forefathers paid to wells and streams; of the food-bringing rivers which, in the old Celtic faith, were 'mothers'; of the eddy in which the water-demon lurked; of the lakes ruled by lovely queens; of the nymphs who were the presiding genii of wells."

# CHAPTER VII.

## HOLY WELLS AND TANKS.

With the learned author of *Tom Tit Tot* we also think with sympathy of the worship of the saint Khwaja Khizr, who is believed by the Syrians to have caused water to flow in the Sabbati fountain in northern Syria and who is ranked among the prohets by the Mahomedans and recognised by the Hindus as a patron saint of boatmen, his Moslem name being Hinduised into Raja Kidar or Kawaj or Pir Badra. He is, however, most widely known as the patron saint of the water of immortality. When the great Sikandar, Alexander of Macedon, went in quest of the blessed waters, Khizr accompanied him, as a guide, to Zulmat, the region of darkness, where the spring of the water of immorality was believed to exist. When they reached Zulmat, Khizr said that only 12 persons should enter that region on 12 mares and that each mare's colt should be tied outside so that should any one lose his way, the mare on which he rode might lead him back to the starting point, following the direction from which she would hear the neighing of her colt. This course was followed. According to one account, the party succeeded in reaching the coveted spring. Khizr drank from it first and then asked Sikandar to drink as much as he liked. The conqueror of the East, however, stood still. He saw before him some very aged birds in a pitiable condition, longing for death and muttering *maut, maut, maut*, death, death, death! Death, however, would not come to them as they had tasted the water of immortality. This was enough to unnerve Alexander and he turned back without tasting the water. According to another tradition, Khizr slipped away in the region of darkness, went alone to the spring and drank from it. Alexander

and his comrades lost their way and were only able to emerge from the darkness with the help of their mares who instinctively followed the direction whence they heard the neighing of their colts.

In India the fish is believed to be the vehicle of Khwaja Khizr. Its image is therefore painted over the doors of Hindus and Mahomedans in Northern India and it became the family crest of one of the royal families of Oudh. When a Mahomedan lad is shaved for the first time, a prayer is offered to the saint and a little boat is launched in his honour in a tank or river. The Hindus as well as the Mahomedans in Upper India invoke his help when their boats go adrift and they worship him by burning lamps and by setting afloat on a village pond a little raft of grass with a lighted lamp placed upon it. A Mahomedan friend who has often taken part in this ceremony which is known as *Khwaja Saheb ka Dalya*, has favoured me with the following description of it: "On the evening of the ceremony people congregate by the side of the river and bring with them a quantity of *dalya*, a confection of wheat, and a tiny boat prepared for the occasion. They then light a *diwa* or ghee lamp, and place it by the side of the *dalya*, which is then consecrated in the name of Khwaja Khizr by reading *Fatiha* over it. A portion of the confection is then placed in the boat which is launched in the river with the small lamp in it. The remaining portion is distributed amongst friends and relations and the poor."

As a rule the Mahomedans do not worship water. They, however, hold the well Zumzum in Mecca in great veneration. It is believed that this single well supplies water to the whole city and that its water comes up bubbling on occasions of religious fervour. The water of the well is also credited with miraculous properties and on their return from the pilgrimage to the holy city almost all the Hajis (pilgrims) bring home the water of Zumzum in small tins and distribute it amongst

friends who use it as a cure for several diseases and also sprinkle it on the sheet covering the dead.

No other holy well attracts the followers of Islam, but for the Hindus the number of such places of pilgrimage is legion. Particularly do they flock in numbers to the sacred rivers which are regarded as the dwelling places of some of the most benevolent deities. In Northern India the Ganges and the Jumna are known as "Ganga Mai", or Mother Ganges, and "Jumnaji" or Lady Jumna. Foremost in the rank of the holy rivers is the Ganges, which, like other rivers, is specially sacred at certain auspicious conjunctions of the planets when crowds of people are seen bathing on her banks. This sanctity is shared by several towns along the shores of the river such as Hardwar, Bithur, Allahabad, Benares and Ganga Sagar. No less sacred is the Godavari, believed to be the site of the hermitage of Gautama. When the planet *Brihaspati* (Jupiter) enters the *Sinha Rashi* (the constellation of Leo), a phenomenon which takes place once in twelve years, the holy Ganges goes to the Godavari and remains there for one year and during that year all the gods bathe in this river. Hence the pilgrimage of thousands of Hindus to Nasik to offer prayers to the Godavari. A pilgrimage similar to this is common in Russia. There, an annual ceremony of blessing the waters of the Neva is usually performed in the presence of the Czar.[1] Multitudes flock to the site and struggle for some of the newly blessed water with which they cross themselves and sprinkle their clothes.

In his "Popular Religion and Folklore of Northern India" Crooke observes that many of the holy wells in Northern India are connected with the wanderings of Rama and Sita after their exile from Ayodhya. Sita's kitchen (*Sita ki rasoi*) is shown in various places, as at Kanauj and Deoriya in the Allahabad

[1] Since this chapter was written Russia has been in the throes of a revolution and it is not known who will preside at the ceremony in future in lieu of the Czar.

District. Her well is on the Bindhachal hill in Mirzapur, and is a famous resort of pilgrims. There is another near Monghyr and a third in the Sultanpur District in Oudh. The Monghyr well has been invested with a special legend. Sita was suspected of faithlessness during her captivity in the kingdom of Ravana. She threw herself into a pit filled with fire, where the hot spring now flows, and came out purified. When Dr. Buchanan visited the place, he heard a new story in connection with it. Shortly before, it was said, the water became so cool as to allow bathing in it. The Governor prohibited the practice as it made the water so dirty that Europeans could not drink it. "But on the very day when the bricklayers began to build a wall in order to exclude the bathers, the water became so hot that no one could dare to touch it, so that the precaution being unnecessary, the work of the infidels was abandoned."[1]

A bath in the waters of wells is believed to have the same efficacy for expiating sin as a bath in the holy rivers. This belief rests on the theory that springs and rivers flow under the agency of an indwelling spirit which is generally benignant and that bathing brings the sinner into communion with the spirit and purifies him in the moral more than in the physical sense. It is believed that even the dead are benefited by such ceremonies.

A very typical case of the efficacy of such religious baths is that of King Trisanku, who had committed three deadly sins. According to one story he tried to win his way to heaven by a great sacrifice which his priest, Vashishtha, declined to perform. According to another account he ran away with the wife of a citizen, and killed in a time of famine the wondrous cow of Vashishtha. Another story accused him of having married his step-mother. After he had been sufficiently chastised, the saint Viswamitra took pity on him and having collected water from all the sacred places in the world, washed him clean of all offences.

[1] W. Crooke: Folklore of Northern India.

The Brahmins also wash themselves of sins with the washing of their sacred thread every year, with a ceremony of sprinkling of water and cow's urine. This ceremony is known as Shrávani amongst the Marathas and Márjan Vidhi amongst the Gujeratis.

It would be impossible to enumerate the numerous sacred wells of India. A few instances may, however, be cited from the *Folklore Notes of Gujarat*.

Six miles to the east of Dwarka there is a *kund* called Pind tarak, where many persons go to perform the *Shrâddha* and the *Nârâyan-bali* ceremonies. They first bathe in the *kund*; then, with its water, they prepare pindas, and place them in a metal dish; red lac is applied to the pindas, and a piece of cotton thread wound round them; the metal dish being then dipped in the *kund*, when the *pindas*, instead of sinking, are said to remain floating on the water. The process is believed to earn a good status for the spirits of departed ancestors in heaven. It is further said that physical ailments brought on by the *avagati*, degradation or fallen condition, of ancestors in the other world, are remedied by the performance of *Shrâddha* on this *kund*.

The Damodar *kund* is situated near Junagadh. It is said that if the bones of a deceased person remaining unburnt after cremation are dipped in this *kund*, his soul obtains *moksha* or final emancipation.

There is a *vav* or reservoir on Mount Girnar, known as Rasa-kupika-vav. It is believed that the body of a person bathing in it becomes as hard as marble, and that if a piece of stone or iron is dipped in the *vav*, it is instantly transformed into gold. But the *vav* is only visible to saints and sages who are gifted with a supernatural vision.

Kashipuri (Benares) contains a *vav* called Gnyan-vav, in which there is an image of Vishweshwar (the Lord of the Universe, i.e., Shiva). A bath in the water from this *vav* is believed to confer upon a person the gift of divine knowledge.



Ganga Mâi.



**Marjan Vidhi**

Washing away of sins with the changing of the Sacred Thread.

In the village of Chunval, a few miles to the north of Viramgam, there is a *kund* known as Loteshwar, near which stands a pipal tree. Persons possessed by ghosts or devils are freed from possession by pouring water at the foot of the tree and taking turns round it, remaining silent the while.

There is a *kund* called Zelāka near Zinzuvadá with a temple of Naleshwar Māhadev near it. The *kund* is said to have been built at the time of King Nala. It is believed locally that every year, on the 15th day of the bright half of Bhādrapad, the holy Ganges visits the *kund* by an underground route. A great fair is held there on that day, when people bathe in the *kund* and give alms to the poor. There is also another *kund* close by, known as Bholava, where the river Saraswati is believed to have halted and manifested herself on her way to the sea.

In Bhadakon near Chuda there is a *kund* called Garigavo. The place is celebrated as the spot of the hermitage of the sage Bhrigu and a fair is held there annually on the last day of *Bhádrapad*.

Persons anxious to attain heaven bathe in the Mrigi *kund* on Mount Girnar; and a bath in the Revati *kund*, which is in the same place, confers male issue on the bather. There is also a *kund* of the shape of an elephant's footprint *Pagahein* on Mount Girnar. It never empties and is held most sacred by pilgrims. People bathe in the Gomati *kund* near Dwarka and take a little of the earth from its bed for the purification of their souls. In the village of Babera, Babhruvāhan the son of Arjun is said to have constructed several *kunds*, all of which are believed to be holy.

A man is said to be released from re-birth if he takes a bath in the *kund* named Katkale-tirtha near Nasik.

A pond near Khapoli in the Kolaba district is held very sacred. The following story is related in connection with it. The villagers say that the water nymphs in the pond used to

provide pots for marriage festivities if a written application was made to them a day previous to the wedding. The pots were, however, required to be returned within a limited time. Once a man failed to comply with this condition and the nymphs have ceased to lend pots.

The nymphs of a pond at Varsai in the Kolaba district were also believed to lend pots on festive occasions. Persons held unclean, *e.g.*, women in their menstrual period, are not allowed to touch it. Similarly, a pool at Pushkar in Northern India turns red if the shadow of a woman during the period falls upon it.

There are seven sacred ponds at Nirmal in the Thana district, forming a large lake. These ponds are said to have been formed from the blood of the demon Vimalsur.

There are sacred pools of hot water in the Vaitarna river in the Thana district, in which people bathe on the 13th day of the dark half of *chaitra*.

At Shahapur there is a holy spring of hot water under a *pipal* tree, called Ganga.

It is held holy to bathe in the *kundas* that are situated in the rivers Jansa and Banganga.

The Manikarnika well at Benares was produced by an ear-ring of Shiva falling into it. If one drinks its water, it brings wisdom. The water of the Jânavâpi well in Benares also possesses the same property.[1]

At Sarkuhiya in the Basti district there is a well where Buddha struck the ground with his arrow and brought forth water just as Moses did from the rock.

Crooke says that he was shown a well in the Muzaffarnagar district into which a Faqir once spat, which for a long time after the visit of the holy man ran with excellent milk. The supply had, however, ceased before the visit.

[1] Crooke: Folklore of Northern India.

A bath in the Man-sarovar near Bahucharaji is said to cause the wishes of the bather to be fulfilled. There is a local tradition that a Rajput woman was turned into a male Rajput of the Solanki class by a bath in its waters.

The cult of the bath for the purification of the soul is not confined to India and the Indian people. It was also wide-spread amongst the European people and prevails even to-day on the Continent. We have already seen that water-worship flourished in Europe before the advent of Christianity and that the new faith though antagonistic to it in principle was considerably tolerant in practice. It is not surprising, therefore, that the old practice should, with a varnish of Christianity, survive up to the present day. In an article contributed not long ago to the *Good Words* magazine, Mr. Colin Bennett observed: "Of all the remnants of ancient pagan worship that which is dying hardest, or more probably has not started to die at all, is the veneration of holy wells and belief in their miraculous properties."

In the year 1893 was published *The Legendary Lore of the Holy Wells of England*, including Rivers, Lakes, Fountains and Springs, by R. C. Hope. Unfortunately, I have not been able to obtain a copy of this book, but from the reviews of the work that appeared in the *Academy* and in the *Athenæum* in August 1893, one gathers that although confessedly imperfect Mr. Hope's catalogue gives 129 names of saints in whose honour English wells have been dedicated. The reviewers give additional instances and point out that if inquiries were made, many more such wells would be discovered. From the list it appears that with the exception of Virgin Mary, who has 29 wells, and all Saints to whom 33 wells are dedicated, wells under the patronage of St. Helen are the most numerous. St. Helen was very popular in England, partly as being the mother of Constantine, the First Christian Emperor, and partly because two English cities, York and Colchester, claimed her as a native. The reviewer of Mr. Hope's work in the

*Athenæum* suggested a third reason also for her popularity. She discovered what was reputed to be the holy cross, hence in many parts of England May 3rd, the festival of "The Invention of the Cross", was called "St. Helen's Day in Spring", and became an important day in village affairs. Menor court rolls bear witness, says the writer, that on that day commons were thrown open for the pasturage of cattle, and occupiers of land adjoining rivers well knew that it was the last day for repairing their banks.

An interesting chapter on Holy Wells is also given in *Knowlson's Origins of Popular Superstitions.* On a little island near the centre of Lough Fine there used to be a place for pilgrims anxious to get rid of their sins, the journey over the water being an important part of the business. In Scotland (Tullie Beltane) there is a Druid temple of eight up-right stones. Some distance away is another temple, and near it a well still held in great veneration, says a writer in the *Gentleman's Magazine (1811).* "On Beltane morning superstitious people go to this well and drink of it; then they make a procession round it nine times; after this they in like manner go round the temple. So deep-rooted is this heathenish superstition in the minds of many who reckon themselves good Protestants, that they will not neglect these rites even when Beltane falls on a Sabbath."

Thomas Quiller-Couch took a deep interest in the holy wells of Cornwall. He visited many of them and the notes taken by him he intended to weave into a volume illustrative of their history and the superstitions which had gathered around them. Unfortunately the intention could not be carried out during his lifetime, but with the help of these notes a volume was subsequently published on the *Ancient and Holy Wells of Cornwall* by M. and L. Quiller-Couch. This volume is not obtainable in Bombay and in this case also I owe my information concerning the work to the review which appeared in the

*Athenæum* of 10th August 1895. During a pilgrimage of several months' duration the joint authors were able to discover more than ninety of such wells. From the account given by the authors it would seem that the Cornish wells are rarely haunted by spirits of any kind. They are holy, and cure all kinds of sickness, madness included. They also tell us of the future, provided proper rites are observed, and we may secure good fortune by dropping a pin or a small coin into the water.

Major-General Forlong cites St. Peter's well at Houston in Renfrewshire, St. Ninian's well at Stirling with its vaulted cell, St. Catherine's well at Liberton, St. Michael's well near the Linlithgow cathedral, and the well of Loch *Maree* as some of the examples. Another sacred well is St. Mungo's over which the Glasgow cathedral stands. In Ireland "we everywhere find peasants kneeling at sacred wells." Of the well of St. Margaret under the black precipitous cliffs of Edinburgh Castle Major-General Forlong says that it is exactly such a spot as he had seen in Central India, "where pious persons precipitated themselves from the rock to please Siva or Kali."[1]

[1] Faiths of Man.

# CHAPTER VIII.

## HEALING WATERS.

Many of these wells are renowned no less for their medicinal properties than for their sanctity. Their waters are believed to be under the care of sanitary guardians and are held to be extremely efficacious in curing many a distemper.

The use of water for therapeutic purposes is mentioned in the Old Testament, where it is stated that Naaman, who suffered from skin disease, dipped himself seven times in the Jordan and was cured. The New Testament records a case of congenital blindness cured by washing in the River Siloa. Balneotherapy and Hydrotherapy were not unknown in Talmudic times. The Talmud mentions a special season between Easter and Whitsun during which people used to go to the spas to take the waters or mudbaths. The cure lasted twenty-one days. In the Temple a special doctor was appointed to attend the priests for intestinal trouble caused by their excessive eating of the flesh of sacrifices and the treatment prescribed for them was the drinking of the water of Siloa. [1]

In Bombay the Manmala tank at Matunga, the major portion of which has been recently filled up and on which the Sassoon Reformatory now stands, has a reputation for curing measles. People from distant parts bring their children to this tank and the nymphs residing in it seldom fail to cure them of the malady. We are not aware of any other city well or tank gifted with such healing powers, but there are several in the Bombay Presidency. The Folklore notes of Gujarat mention a few. The water of the Krukalas

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[1] Dr. Felman: The Jewish Child.

well in the island of Shankhodwar is believed to cure fever and diseases caused by morbid heat. A draught of the water of the Gomukhi-Ganga, near Girnar, gives one absolute immunity from an attack of cholera. The water of a gozara well (*i.e.*, a well which is polluted owing to a person drowned in it) cures children of bronchitis and cough. There is a well near Ramdorana, of which the water is effective against cough, and the water of the Bahamania well near Vasawad is credited with the same virtue. The water of the Mrigi Kund near Junagadh cures leprosy. The Pipli well near Talawad is well-known for the stimulating effect of its water on the digestive organs. The residents of Bombay, however, need not go to Talawad for this boon. There are in the city the Bhikha Behram well on Churchgate Street and the High Court well on Mayo Road renowned for similar properties of their water. In Northern India hydrophobia is believed to be cured if the patient looks down seven wells in succession, while in Gujarat when a person is bitten by a rabid dog, he goes to a well inhabited by a *Vâchharo*, the spirit who curses hydrophobia, with two earthen cups filled with milk with a pice in each, and empties the contents into the water. In the island of Shiel there is a *vav* called *Than-vav* where mothers who cannot suckle their children for want of milk wash their bodices which, when subsequently put on, are believed to cause the necessary secretion of milk.

It was recently brought to my notice that the guardian spirit of a well in Lonavla also possessed the gift of blessing mothers with milk. After that well had been dug, a goat was offered by the owner of the well to the spirit. This offering proved most unacceptable and the waters of the well at once dried up. The owner implored pardon and vowed that no animal sacrifice would ever again be offered, and that milk and ghee would be presented instead. This had the desired effect and the guardian spirit of the water has since been most friendly. "A few months ago," said my informant, "a young lady was desirous of getting milk for her new-born babe. After fruitless

attempts for a fortnight, she took an oath that she would present to the water-saint *ghadas* of milk and ghee and she was forthwith blest with milk for the infant."

In the Konkan the water of a well drawn without touching the earth or without being placed upon the ground is given as medicine for indigestion.

There are ponds at Manora in the Goa State and Vetore in the Savantwadi State, the water of which is used for the cure of persons suffering from the poison of snakes, mice, spiders and scorpions.

If a person is bitten by a snake or other poisonous reptile, no medicine is administered to him, but holy water brought from the temple of the village goddess is given to him to drink and it is said that the patient is cured.

At Shivam in the Ratnagiri district people use the *tirtha* of a deity, or the water in which its idol is washed, as medicine for diseases due to poison. It is the sole remedy they resort to in such cases.

The water of seven tanks, or at least of one pond, in which lotuses grow, is said to check the virulence of measles and small-pox.

A bath in a tank in the Mahim district is said to cure persons suffering from skin diseases.

The well at Sihor in Rajputana is sacred to Gautama and is considered efficacious in the cure of various disorders.

In Satara King Sateshwar asked the saint Sumitra for water. The sage was wrapped in contemplation, and did not answer him. The angry monarch took some lice from the ground and threw them at the saint, who cursed the king with vermin all over his body. This affliction the wretched monarch endured for twelve years, until he was cured by ablution at the sacred fountain of Devarâshta.[1]

The birth of a child under the *mul nakshatra* endangers the life of its father, but the misfortune is averted if the child and its parents bathe in the water drawn from 108 wells. A draught of such water is said to cure *Sannipat* or delirium.

[1] Bombay Gazetteer, xix.

One of the sacred tanks of India is "the Lake of Immortality" at Amritsar. The name of the city is taken from the sacred tank in which the Golden Temple is built. Originally, the place was only a natural pool of water and a favourite resort of Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh religion. It was known at first as *Guru-ka-chall*, but later when the tank was built, the name Amritsar was adopted, *amrit* meaning water of immortality and *sar* meaning a tank. A holy woman once took pity on a leper, and carried him to the banks of the tank. As he lay there, a crow swooped into the water and came out a dove as white as snow. Seeing the miracle, the leper was tempted to bathe in the river and was healed. The woman could not recognize her friend, and withdrew in horror from his embraces. But the Guru Ram Dâs came and explained matters, and "the grateful pair assisted him in embellishing the tank, which has now become the centre of the Sikh religion."[1]

The tank at Lalitpur is similarly famous for the cure of leprosy. One day, a Râjâ afflicted with the disease was passing by, and his Râni dreamt that he should eat some of the confervæ on the surface. He ate it, and was cured; next night the Râni dreamt that there was a vast treasure concealed there, which when dug up was sufficient to pay the cost of excavation. At Qasur is the tank of the saint Basant Shâh, in which children are bathed to cure them of boils.[2]

There are several hot springs in India renowned for their curative powers. These also are believed to be sacred to certain deities. A typical example is that of the hot kund, called *Devki-Unai*, about 30 miles to the south of Surat. Many pilgrims visit the place on the fifteenth day of the bright half of *Chaitra*, when the waters are cool, to offer money, cocoanuts, and red lead to the *Unai Mata*, whose temple stands near the kund.

[1] Crooke: Folklore of Northern India, vol. I.

[2] *Ibid.*

It is said that king Rama built this kund while performing a sacrifice and brought water from the *pâtâl* (nether regions) by shooting an arrow into the earth.

Similarly, the famous hot springs forming one group in a line along the bed of the Tansa river in the village of Vadavli are sacred to the goddess Vajrabai or Vajreshvari, the Lady of the Thunderbolt. According to tradition, this neighbourhood being full of demons the goddess Vajrabai became incarnate in the locality to clear it of the wicked spirits. She routed the whole lot of them, and the hot water of these springs is nothing but the blood of one of the demons slain by her. Her chronicle, or *Mahatmya*, is kept at the village of Gunj, some six miles to the north, and her temple is placed at the top of a flight of steps on a spur of the Sumatra range. A large fair is held here in Chaitra (April). There are other hot springs in the neighbouring villages of Akloli, known as the Rameshwar hot springs, whose waters are gathered out in stone cisterns. In the eighteenth century these springs were much used both by Indians and Europeans as a cure for fevers. In his *Oriental Memoirs* James Forbes describes the springs as consisting of small cisterns of water with a temperature of 120°. "Except that it wanted a small element of iron the water tasted like that of Bath in England." In the Ganeshpuri village, about three miles west of Vajrabai, are the two hottest springs of the group. These are resorted to by people troubled with skin diseases.

The Arabs regard the hot springs at Terka Main to be under the control of a Vali who makes the fire and keeps it burning. Those who go there to be healed of rheumatism invoke the saint and keep up the fire so that the water may be hot. At the Lunatic Asylum of Hamath there is a pool believed to be the abode of a Vali who is the patron saint of all insane people. He appears in the night and blesses the insane by touching them. Even troublesome children come under the spell of his influence. The Arabs take the robes of refractory urchins to

the pool and wash them in it so as to instil wisdom and obedience in the children.

Similarly, the special function of the Altarnum well was the cure of madness. The afflicted person was made to stand with his back to the pool and was then tumbled headlong into the water by a sudden blow in the breast. In the water again stood a strong fellow who took him and tossed him up and down.[1] This ritual appears to be a survival of human sacrifice, while the ritual followed in connection with St. Tecla's well, renowned for the cure of epilepsy, bears testimony to the practice of offering animal sacrifices to the presiding spirits of water.

In his *Tour in Wales*, speaking of the village of Llandegla, where is a church dedicated to St. Tecla, virgin and martyr, who after her conversion by St. Paul suffered under Nero at Iconium, Pennant says: "About two hundred yards from the church, in a quillet called Gwern Degla, rises a small spring. The water is under the tutelage of the saint, and to this day held to be extremely beneficial in the falling sickness. The patient washes his limbs in the well; makes an offering into it of four-pence; walks round it three times; and thrice repeats the Lord's Prayer. These ceremonies are never begun till after sunset, in order to inspire the votaries with greater awe. If the afflicted be of the male sex, like Socrates, he makes an offering of a cock to his Aesculapius, or rather to Tecla, Hygeia; if of the fair sex, a hen. The fowl is carried in a basket, first round the well, after that into the churchyard, when the same orisons and the same circumambulations are performed round the church. The votary then enters the church, gets under the communion-table, lies down with the Bible under his or her head, is covered with the carpet or cloth, and rests there till break of day, departing after offering six pence, and leaving the fowl in the church. If the bird dies, the cure is supposed to have been effected and the disease transferred to the devoted victim."

[1] Hunt: Popular Romances.

The most famous healing well in England is perhaps the Holywell, the Lourdes of Wales. The story of this well is the story of St. Winefride, the waters of whose fount were declared by the Protestant antiquarian, Pennant, to be "almost as sanative as those of the Pool of Bethesda." In the 7th century the picturesque valley of Sychnant had as its chieftain Thewith, whose wife was the sister of St. Beuno, and whose daughter, Winefride, was a very beautiful girl, who had many suitors, but who resolved to consecrate herself to God in a life of virginity. One of the most persistent of her suitors was Prince Caradoc, who, enraged at his rejection, made a furious onslaught on the girl, compelling her to seek safety in flight. With drawn sword he pursued and overtook her on the majestic hill which overlooked the town. Here he cut off her head, which rolled to the foot of the hill. Till then, Sychnant had been waterless—its name, indeed, signifies the dry valley, but at the spot where the severed head rested, a copious stream burst forth, forming a well, the sides of which were lined with fragrant moss, whilst the stones at the bottom were tinctured with the youthful martyr's blood. The head itself was reunited by St. Beuno to Winefride's body, which was immediately restored to life by the Almighty in response to the saint's prayers. Winefride subsequently became a nun, dying at Gwytherin on November 3rd, 1660.

Around the Well in Sychnant Valley grew a town which the Saxons named Treffynion, and which became known to the Normans as Haliwell, the hallowed or holy well, to which pilgrims fared from all parts of the kingdom, inspired by the belief that through the intercession of St. Winefride they would obtain spiritual and temporal blessings. Through the centuries preceding the Reformation, the Welsh Princes, the monarchs of England and the nobles of both countries delighted to bestow marks of their favour on Holywell and its shrine and Well of St. Winefride. One of the greatest of these benefactors was the mother of Henry VII., Margaret, Countess of Richmond and

Derby, who, in the fifteenth century, erected the handsome Gothic chapel and the Well beneath it. The water was received in a magnificent polygonal basin, covered by a groined arch, supported on pillars. The roof was elaborately carved in stone, and many fine ribs secured the arch, whose intersections were completed with sculpture. On one side of the wall was painted the history of St. Winefride, whilst the arms of the foundress and those of Henry VII., Henry VIII., Catherine of Aragon, and other benefactors were incorporated in the decorations.

Though the church of Holywell was devoted to other uses after the Reformation, and recourse to the well was regarded as a "superstitious practice," the tide of visitors never completely ceased to flow. In 1629, for example, a spy is found reporting Sir Cuthbert Clifton as being one of a great number of "Papists and priests assembled at St. Winefride's Well on St. Winefride's Day."

The following paragraph from Archbishop Laud's account of his Province for the year 1633 also shows that in spite of all repressive measures pilgrims resorted in great numbers to the well:—

"The Bishop of St. Asaph returns. That all is exceedingly well in his diocese—save only that the number and boldness of some Romish Recusants increaseth much in many Places, and is encouraged by the superstitions and frequent concourse of some of that party to Holy-Well, otherwise called St. Winifride's Well. Whether this Concourse be by way of Pilgrimage or no, I know not; but I am sure it hath long been complained of without remedy."

One of the visitors in the year 1686 was James II. and in the following year Father Thomas Roberts was appointed priest in charge. The well has ever since been a favourite resort of stricken pilgrims and the modern tourist in North Wales can still witness numerous pilgrims journeying to St. Winefride's in the hope of

leaving their infirmities behind them. The deaf, the dumb, the blind and the paralysed have for centuries betaken themselves to this well in search of spiritual as well as physical health and the votive crutches, chairs and barrows left hanging over the well by the pilgrims who have been able to discard them bear testimony to the healing virtues of its water or at least to the faith of the people in such virtues.

In Lilly's History of his life and times a story is given of Sir George Peckham, Kt., who died in St. Winefride's Well, "having continued so long mumbling his paternosters and *Sancta Winifreda ora pro me*, that the cold struck into his body and after his coming forth of that well he never spoke more."

Two recent Holywell cures were reported in the *Catholic Times and Catholic Opinion* of 21st July 1916. Mr. John MacMullan, whose address was 49 Station-Road, Shettleston, Glasgow, decided to try the water of St. Winefride's Well after suffering for three years with chronic spinal disease. He bathed in the waters for the first time on July 5th, and again on July 6th, when he experienced a sharp shooting pain all through the body. On July 10th after getting in the well he found that he was able to walk up the steps which descended into the outer basin of the well quite unaided and up to the 12th of July, when he returned to Scotland, he was able to walk about freely.

The other noteworthy case following on a visit to St. Winefride's Well is that of Miss Elizabeth Stanley of 54, John Thomas Street, Blackburn. She had her hand cut in a mill while working as a weaver and was unable to work for two years. In quest of a cure she made a pilgrimage to St. Winefride's Well on the Feast of Corpus Christi. "Since her return from Holywell," it is reported, "she has followed her work without any ill effects and is at present in the best of health."

While this chapter was being written, a great calamity befell Holywell. Owing to the boring operations of the Halken Draining Company the waters of this famous well that had been

flowing for 1400 years were drained away on the 5th January 1917. The valley of Sychnant became once more "the dry valley", but to the great joy of the people of Holywell and of the Catholic community everywhere the water was restored to the well on the 22nd September 1917.

A few more healing wells in Great Britain may be noted. The "Hooping Stone" on a farm near Athol, is a channeled boulder which catches rain, and the water, especially if ladled out with a spoon made from the horn of a living cow, cures many ailments. The "Fever Well" hard by is also still in high repute. The Mayor and Burgesses of Shaftesbury still go to dance round the sacred springs of Enmore Green, hand in hand to the sound of music—or did so until recently. They carried a broom decked with feathers, gold rings, and jewels, called a "prize bezant", and presented to the bailiff of the manor of Gillingham (where are the springs) a pair of gloves, a raw calf's head, a gallon of beer and two penny loaves.[1]

Another holy well, Roche Holy Well of Cornwall, is famous for curing eye diseases. This well, which is dedicated to the lonely hermit by name St. Conan, is endowed on Holy Thursday, and also the two Thursdays following, with the property of curing eye diseases alike in young and old.

At Chapel Uny rickety children are dipped three times in the well against the sun, and dragged three times round the well in the same direction.

In several instances such miraculous cures appear to be well authenticated. Mr. Colin Bennett says that Jesus Well, St. Minver, and Madron Holy Well, near Pengance, are cases in point. Bishop Hall, of Exeter, who visited the latter well in 1640, absolutely vouches, in his treatise on the *Invisible World*, for the cure of a man by name John Trelille who had been lame from birth and had to crawl on all fours from place

[1] Major-General Forlong: Faiths of Man, vol. III.

to place. At last he decided to try the virtue of the waters of this holy well for his complaint and, like Naaman of old, bathed himself in the little spring, afterwards reclining for an hour and a half on a grassy bank situated near by and known as St. Madrne's bed while a friend offered up simple prayers on his behalf. On the first occasion of this treatment he got some relief, on the second he was able to stand on his legs with the aid of a staff and on the third occasion he found himself entirely cured. It is even said that in later life he enlisted in the army and was eventually killed in battle, having previously done good work for his country's cause. Others have also been cured of the same affliction in later times by precisely the same means. Close by this well is the ancient oratory of St. Madrne, where on the first Sunday in May a service is still held by the Wesleyans in commemoration of the saintly man who once preached in that lonely spot the word of God. After the service the Holy Well is visited by the people, some of whom, says Mr. Bennett, "go so far as to consult it concerning futurity."

Many springs in Macedonia are known and venerated as "sacred waters"; dedicated to St. Friday and St. Solomoné among feminine saints, or to St. Paul and St. Elias among their male colleagues. The water of these springs is regarded as efficacious against diseases, especially eye-complaints. Even so stood enclosed the "fair-flowing fountain built by man's hand, whence the citizens of Ithaca drew water," and close to it "an altar erected in honour of the Nymphs, upon which the wayfarers offered sacrifice." Like the Homeric "fountain of the Nymphs" many a modern "holy spring" is overshadowed by "water-bred poplars or broad-leaved fig-trees, and weeping willows." [1]

Hundreds of cures are effected even now at the Church of the Annunciation over the Chapel of the well during the Festival of Annunciation at Tenos. During her visit to the place Miss Hamilton saw priests spooning out the sacred water to

[1] G. F. Abbott: Macedonian Folklore.

an eager crowd, one by one, "after the fashion of a medicine-giving nurse." Miss Hamilton is, however, guilty of repeating a very blasphemous story concerning a spring of therapeutic fame. Up to quite recent times the festival at Kaisariani was very popular among the Athenians and sick people were taken there for cure at the spring on the Ascension Day, the only day on which the spring water ran into the little Chapel, and in a miraculous way a white dove, the Holy Spirit, appeared and wet its wings in the holy water. Then all the sick people drank of the water or washed in it and expected to be healed. One festival day this dove failed to appear, and the priest knocked with his foot and whispered, "Let out the Holy Spirit." A voice from the hole replied audibly, "The cat has eaten it." This was enough to suppress the miracle.

The pilgrimage described by Miss Hamilton recalls the vivid scenes in Emile Zola's famous novel *Lourdes*. In that masterpiece of his the great master of Médan has given us a marvellously animated and poetic narrative of the annual national pilgrimage to the famous Continental shrine. The idea of human suffering pervades the whole story and the woful account of the despairing sufferers given up by science and by man and of the religious enthusiasm with which they address themselves to a higher Power in the hope of relief and hasten to Lourdes and crowd themselves round the miraculous Grotto, is touching indeed. The author, no doubt, accompanies the stricken pilgrims without sharing their belief in the virtues of the water of Lourdes. He witnesses several instances of real cure, accepts the extraordinary manifestations of the healing power of the waters, but tries to account for them on scientific grounds. Be the explanation as it may, *Lourdes* affords striking illustrations of the faith of the people in the miracles of the enchanted fountain.

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# CHAPTER IX.
# PROCREATIVE POWERS OF WATER SPIRITS.

Water-spirits being authors of fertility in general, it is natural that they should be credited with the power of fertilizing human beings as well as animals. In many places the power of bestowing offspring is ascribed to them, and several wells in India have a reputation for conferring the blessings of parenthood.

The Hindus believe that "a son secures three worlds, a grandson bliss, and a great grandson a seat even above the highest heavens. By begetting a virtuous son one saves oneself as well as the seven preceding and seven succeeding generations." Childless women, therefore, resort to various expedients. Of these pilgrimages to shrines of saints and visits to Faqirs and Mullas who have miraculous charms in their possession are most common. But the most effective charm is water. In many parts of India the water of seven wells is collected on the night of the Dewali, or feast of lamps, and barren women bathe in it as a means of procuring children. A more elaborate ritual is observed by the domiciled Hindus of Baluchistan. There the childless woman takes water from seven different wells, tanks or springs and places into it leaves of seven kinds of fruit-bearing trees. She then doffs her clothes, wraps a cotton sheet around her and sits over the board of a spinning wheel under the wooden spout of a house, with some of the leaves under her feet. Another woman, blest with living children, mounts to the top of the house, and pours the mystical water on the roof so that it trickles over the childless woman through the spout. After the bath she dons new clothes and greets her husband and impregnation takes place immediately. The same ceremony is resorted to in cases in which successive girls have been born, and the birth of a son is assured.[1]

[1] Ethnographic Survey of Baluchistan, Vol II.

In a *vav* in Orissa priests throw betel-nuts into the mud and barren women scramble for them. Those who find them will have their desire for children gratified. For the same reason, the mother is taken after childbirth to worship the village well. She walks round it in the course of the sun and smears the platform with red lead, which is a survival of the original rite of blood sacrifice. In Dharwar the child of a Brahman is taken in the third month to worship water at the village well. There is also a belief in Gujarat that barren couples get children if they bathe in a waterfall and offer cocoanuts

In the Punjab sterile women desiring offspring are let down into a well on a Sunday or a Tuesday night during the Dewali. After the bath they are drawn up again and they perform the *Chaukpurna* ceremony with incantations. When this ceremony has been performed, the well is supposed to run dry. Its quickening and fertilizing virtue has been abstracted by the woman.[1] This practice has its counterpart in a custom observed by Syrian women at the present day. Some of the channels of the Orontes are used for irrigation, but at a certain season of the year the streams are turned off and the dry bed of the channels is cleared of mud and other impurities obstructing a free flow of water. The first night that the water is turned on again, it is said to have the power of procreation. Accordingly, barren women take their places in the channel, waiting for the entrance of the water-spirit in the rush of the stream.

Sir James Frazer says that in Scotland the same fertilizing virtue used to be, and probably still is, ascribed to certain springs. Wives who wished to become mothers formerly resorted to the well of St. Fillan at Comrie and to the wells of St. Mary at Whitekirk and in the Isle of May. In the Aran Islands, off the Coast of Galway, women desirous of children

[1] Census of India, 1901, Vol. XVII.

pray at St. Eany's Well and the men pray at the Rag Well by the Church of the Four Comely Ones at Onaght. Similarly, Child's Well in Oxford was supposed to have "the virtue of making barren women to bring forth." Near Bingfield in Northumberland there is a copious sulphur spring known as the Borewell. About Midsummer day a great fair is held there and barren women pray at the well that they might become mothers.

Some folklorists, Sir James Frazer included, consider that sterility was believed by people to be a disease due, as in the case of other maladies, to the work of demoniacal agency. They therefore include this practice of bathing in wells for the blessings of motherhood in the same category in which they place the cult of the bath based on popular faith in the healing powers of water. But there is probably another explanation for this practice. Students of the rites and customs observed by the Semitic people are aware that procreative power was attributed by these people to the spirits. Professor Curtiss bears testimony to this and he says that even Moslems and Christians of Syria conceived of God as possessed of a complete male organism. It was a common belief amongst the Syrians that the genii, both male and female, had sexual intercourse with human beings and the view that the spirits of the dead may beget children also prevailed. When a man had been executed for murder in Jerusalem, about fifty years ago, some barren women rushed up to the corpse. It may be, says Curtiss, that they felt that, inasmuch as the man had been released by death from previous nuptials and was free, as a disembodied spirit, he was endowed with supernatural power to give them the joy of motherhood by proximity to his dead body. After his recent researches in Syria Curtiss says that this belief in the procreative powers of the dead is still common.

There are three places at the so-called baths of Solomon in Syria, where the hot air comes out of the ground. One of these hot air vents, called Abu Rabah, is a famous shrine for women

who are barren and desire children. They in fact regard the *Vali* (Saint) of the shrine as the father of children born after such a visit, as appears from the English rendering of an Arabic couplet, which they repeat as they go inside the small inclosure and allow the hot air to steam up their bodies :

"Oh, Abu Rabah,
To thee come the white ones,
To thee come the fair ones ;
With thee is the generation,
With us is the conception."

These verses clearly unfold the minds of the women who woo the spirits for the joys of motherhood. May not the corresponding faith of Indian women in sanctified waters be traced to similar ideas ? The Bombay and Orissa practices described above do not materially support that view, but the Punjab practice and the belief of the Punjabis that the well runs dry after the bath and that its fertilizing virtue is abstracted by the women bathing in it are very significant.

The Jews also believed in the possibility of conception occurring in a bath *in quo spermatizaverat homo*. Ben Sira was said to have been the son of a daughter of Jeremiah who became *enceinte* from her father in that way. "Indeed," says Dr. Feldman, "the Rabbi who expressed himself as a believer in such an occurrence was Simon ben Zoma, a sage of the second century A.D., who devoted a good deal of his time to metaphysical problems, and whose mind gave way in consequence. The question that was asked of him, no doubt sarcastically, was whether the High Priest, who may only marry a virgin, was allowed to marry a pregnant virgin. Ben Zoma answered the question in the affirmative, because, said he, conception was possible in a bath in which a man had just before washed himself." [1]

This theory, observes Dr. Feldman, was still in vogue even among physicians of the twelfth century. Averroes, an Arabian

[1] The Jewish Child.

physician who died in 1198, records that an acquaintance of his, whose *bona fides* was beyond dispute, stated on her oath that *impregnata fuerat subito in balneo lavelli aquæ calidæ in quo spermatiz averunt mali homines cum essent balneati in illo balneo.* Another author explains the possibility of such an occurrence as follows: *Quia vulva trahit sperma propter suam propriam virtutem.*

"In the sixteenth century," continues Dr. Feldman, "we find the Portuguese Amatus Lusitanus (1550) making use of the same theory to explain the delivery of a mole by a nun; and, according to Stern, this belief is prevalent in Turkey even at the present day. The Rabbis of the Middle Ages also believed in such a possibility. Even as late as the beginning of the eighteenth century this belief prevailed, and R. Juda Rozanes, Rabbi of Constantinople, who, on the authority of Maimonides, considered such an occurrence improbable, was reprimanded by Azulai."

In Scotland persons who bore the name of the river Tweed were supposed to have as ancestors the genii of the river of that name. Could this curious belief have sprung from similar ideas concerning the procreative powers of the water-spirits?

These conceptions of the generative power of water have their parallel in a Semong tradition. These people, among whom marital relationship is preceded by great ante-nuptial freedom, have a legend of a people in their old home, composed of women only. "These women know not men, but when the moon is at the full, they dance naked in the grassy places near the salt lakes, the evening wind is their only spouse, and through him they conceive and bear children."[1]

[1] Clifford: In Court and Campong.

# CHAPTER X.

## WISHING AND CURSING WELLS.

In East and West alike there are oracular wells inhabited by spirits gifted with powers of divination. The instance of the well in Ghoga Street in Bombay has already been noted. There is a *kund* in Baladana near Wadhawan, dedicated to Hol, the favourite *mata* of the Charans. In this *kund*, black or red *gagar bedinus* pieces of cotton thread are sometimes seen floating on the water. They appear only for a moment, and sink if any one endeavours to seize them. The appearance of black pieces forbodes famine; but the red ones foretell prosperity. At Askot, in the Himalayas, there is a holy well which is used for divining the prospects of the harvest. If the spring in a given time fills the brass vessel to the brim into which the water falls, there will be a good season; if only a little water comes, drought may be expected. In a well in Kashmir those who have any special desires throw a nut. If it floats, it is considered an omen of success. If it sinks, it is a sign of misfortune.

With this may be compared the divinations performed by sailors at the fountain of Recoverance or St. Laurent. To know the future state of the weather they cast on the waters of the fountain a morsel of bread. If the bread floats, says Evans Wentz in *Fairy Faith in Celtic Countries*, it is a sure sign of fair weather, but if it sinks, of weather so bad that no one should venture to go out in the fishing boats. Similarly, in some wells, pins are dropped by lovers. If the pins float, the water-spirits give a promise of favourable auspices, but if the pins sink, the maiden is unhappy, and will hesitate in accepting the proposal of marriage.

The most famous modern oracle in Greece is the well at Amorgos. It stands in a little side shrine, where the priest offers a prayer to St. George. Then he draws some water from the well in a small vessel and diagnoses the contents. The rules for the interpretation are quite lengthy, but the answers are usually ambiguous. These answers are given according to the foreign matter in the water. For example, hair denotes trouble and sickness.

Near Kirk-michael in Banff there is a fountain, once highly celebrated and anciently dedicated to St. Michael. Many a patient has by its waters been restored to health, and many more have attested the efficacy of their virtues. But, as the presiding power is sometimes capricious, and apt to desert his charge, the fountain now lies neglected, choked with weeds, unhonoured and unfrequented. In better days, it was not so; for the winged guardian, under the semblance of a fly, was never absent from his duty. If the sober matron wished to know the issue of her husband's ailment, and the love-sick nymph that of her languishing swain, they visited the well of St. Michael. Every movement of the sympathetic fly was regarded in silent awe; and as he appeared cheerful or dejected, the anxious votaries drew their presages; and their breasts vibrated with corresponding emotions.[1]

Similarly, at a Cornish well, people used to go and inquire about absent friends. If the person "be living and in health, the still, quiet waters of the well-pit will instantly bubble or boil up as a pot of clear, crystal-like water; if sick, foul and puddled water; if dead, it will neither boil nor bubble up, nor alter its colour or stillness."

In his Monastic Remains, More refers to the existence of two wishing wells in Walsingham Chapel. "The wishing wells," he observes, "still remain, two circular stone pits filled with water,

[1] Statistical Account of Scotland.

enclosed with a square wall, where the pilgrims used to kneel and throw in a piece of gold whilst they prayed for the accomplishment of their wishes."

Pennant in his account of St. Winefride's well says: "Near the steps, two feet beneath the water is a large stone, called the wishing stone. It receives many a kiss from the faithful who are supposed never to fail in experiencing the completion of their desires, provided the wish is delivered with full devotion and confidence."

Another famous wishing well is in Cornwall, named the Fairy Well, Carbis Bay. After the enquirer has formed his wish with his back to the well, he throws a pin over his left shoulder. If it strikes the water he obtains his wish, if it falls on the bank, he is disappointed. "The little well," says Mr. Colin Bennett in the *Good Words Magazine* "is much resorted to at the present day by tourists and all those who have a sense of the quaintness or romance of such ancient observances."

The priestess of Gulval Well in Fosses Moor was an old woman who instructed the devotees in their ceremonial observances. They had to kneel down and lean over the well so as to see their faces in the water and repeat after their instructor a rhyming incantation, after which, the reply of the spirit of the well was interpreted by the bubbling of the water or its quiescence.

Just as there are wishing wells, there are cursing wells also, scattered through Europe, particularly in Celtic countries. The Kelts of Bretagne, says Major-General Forlong,[1] still fear not only "our Lady of Hate," but also the "Well of Cursing." The belief was, and perhaps still is, that if certain evil rites are performed, and a stone inscribed with the enemy's name is thrown into such a well, the victim will pine away and die, unless he who has inflicted the curse relents, and removes the baneful charm ere it be too late.[2]

[1] Faiths of Man.

[2] *The Athenæum*, August 26, 1893.

Near the well of St. Aelian, not far from Betteas Abergeley in Denbighshire, resided a woman who officiated as a kind of priestess. Any one who wished to inflict a curse upon an enemy resorted to this priestess, and for a trifling sum she registered in a book kept for the purpose the name of the person on whom the curse was intended to fall. A pin was then dropped into the well in the name of the victim and the curse was complete.[1]

Varied indeed are the virtues of Holy Wells and the wonders connected with them. A peculiar property of the water of St. Keyne is that whoever first drinks of it after marriage becomes the ruler in the household. "I know not," says Fuller, "whether it be worth the reporting, that there is in Cornwall, near the parish of St. Neots, a well, arched over with the robes of four kinds of trees, withy, oak, elm, and ash, dedicated to St. Keyne. The reported virtue of the water is this, that whether husband or wife come first to drink thereof, they get the mastery thereby." After his visit to Cornwall Southey celebrated this well in the famous poem, "The Well of St. Keyne."

"St. Keyne," quoth the Cornish-man, "many a time
Drank of this crystal Well,
And before the Angel summon'd her,
She laid on the water a spell.

"If the Husband of this gifted Well
Shall drink before his Wife,
A happy man thenceforth is he,
For he shall be Master for life.

"But if the Wife should drink of it first,
God help the husband then!"
The Stranger stoopt to the Well of St. Keyne,
And drank of the water again.

[1] G. L. Gomme: Ethnology in Folklore.

'You drank of the Well I warrant betimes?"
He to the Cornish-man said:
But the Cornish-man smiled as the Stranger spake,
And sheepishly shook his head.

"I hasten'd as soon as the wedding was done,
And left my Wife in the porch;
But i' faith she had been wiser than me,
For she took a bottle to Church."

At the foot of Carn Brea Hill is a little well dedicated to St. Eunius. To be baptised in the water drawn from this is a sure safeguard against death by hanging.

Of the Rin Mochan pool the Brahmins say that any one who bathes there becomes free from debt.

Strange traditions are not wanting, says Mr. Colin Bennett,[1] to account for the wonderful state in which these wells are preserved. It is impossible to remove the stones of the well of St. Cleer, which is situated near Liskeard. True, they may be carted away at daytime, but they all return at night and deposit themselves in heaps on the site from which they were taken. Similar stories are related of the marvellous powers of the basin which catches the water as it issues from the spring at St. Nun'e Well, Pelynt, near Looe and of the Bisland Holy Well the ground surrounding which can never be broken for tillage on penalty of disaster to the family of the person attempting to do so.

[1] Good Words Magazine, 1905.

# CHAPTER XI.

## MALEFICENT WATER-GOBLINS.

So far we have met beneficent spirits of the divine sea and blessed springs and wells. Let us not forget that there are also maleficent deities and mischievous water-goblins infesting ill-omened streams and wells. In India where the lives and fortunes of cattle and people alike hang on the precarious seasonal rainfall, the water-spirits are as a rule regarded as friendly dispensers of life and fertility. Even the sea-gods are on the whole beneficent beings. The *Darya-Pirs* of the Luvanas (merchants) and Kharvas (sailors) are devoid of mischief and are regarded as patron saints. Elsewhere, however, the perils of the deep and rapid rivers and treacherous pools gave the water-spirits a bad name and their fury emphasized the need for propitiating them with sacrifices. Thus it comes to pass that western folklore abounds in blood-thirsty water-demons who are very often conceived as hideous serpents or dragons. But, as we have already noticed, people of India also have their mischievous water-sprites, the *Matas* and *Shankhinies* who haunt wayside wells and either drown or enter the persons of those who go near their wells. These ghosts and goblins—*bhuts* and *prets*—are known as *Jalachar*, *i.e.*, living in water, as contrasted with *Bhuchar*, those hovering on the earth. One has to propitiate these malignant deities and spirits.

It is believed that most of the demons haunting wells and tanks are the spirits of those who have met death by drowning. There are also the spirits of those who die of accidents before the fulfilment of their worldly desires or the souls of the deceased who do not receive the funeral *pindas* with the proper obsequies. These fallen souls in their *avagati* or degraded condition reside near the scene of their death and molest those who approach the water. There is a *vav* called ***Nilkanth vav*** near Movaiya, in which a *Pinjari* (a female cotton

carder) is said to have been drowned and to have been turned into a ghost, in which form she occasionally presents herself to the people.

Another *vav* in Vadhwan is haunted by a ghost called Mahda, who drowns one human being every third year as a victim But a male spirit, named Kshetrapal, resides in the *kotta* (or entrance) of the *vav*, and saves those who fall near the entrance. Those who fall in any other part are, however, sure to be drowned.

There is in Mirzapur a famous water-hole, known as Barewa. A herdsman was once grazing his buffaloes near the place, when the waters rose in fury and carried him off with his cattle. The drowned buffaloes have now taken the form of a dangerous demon known as *Bhainsasura*, or the buffalo-demon, and he lives there in company with the Naga and the Nagan and none dare fish there until he has propitiated these demons with the offerings of a fowl, eggs and goat.

Until recently the Bengalis believed that a water-spirit in the form of an old hag called *Jatè Buddi* haunted tanks and ponds and fettered with an invisible chain the feet of persons who approached her territories. Even to this day the name of this witch is taken to frighten naughty children. Another Bengal spirit, called *Jakh*, was believed to reside in tanks and to guard hidden treasure. Woe to the man who threw covetous eyes on that treasure! The Sion Indians believe in a water-demon called Unk-tahe who, like the Siamese spirit Pnuk, drags underneath the water those who go to bathe in it.[1]

Corresponding to these haunted wells are the water holes in Scotland, known as the "cups of the fairies," and the Trinity Well in Ireland into which no one can gaze with impunity, and from which the river Bayne once burst forth in pursuit of a lady who had insulted it.

[1] Mr. Sarat Chandra Mitra in the *Journal* of the Anthropological Society of Bombay, Vol. III.

In Indian folklore this wicked class of water-nymphs is known as Apsarás. The village of Mith-Báv in Ratnagiri is a well-known resort of these nymphs and the villagers relate many a thrilling story of persons drowned and carried off by them in the river. Another favourite habitat of these water-spirits is a tank in the village of Hindalem in the same district. Every reservoir of water in Thana is believed to be a habitat of water-nymphs. Some, however, believe that they dwell only in those lakes in which lotuses grow. The images of seven *apsarás* are particularly worshipped by the people, *viz.*, Machhi, Kurmi, Karkati, Darduri, Jatupi, Somapa and Makari.

Greek folklore represents these nymphs as tall and slim, clad in white, with flowing golden hair, and divinely beautiful, so much so that the highest compliment that can be paid to a Greek maiden is to compare her in loveliness to a Neraida. Such beauty, however, is fatal to the beholder and many a story is related of people who having exposed themselves to its fascination were bereft of speech or suffered otherwise. A single illustration will suffice. In the island of Chios is a bridge called the Maid's Bridge, which is popularly believed to be haunted by a water-spirit. Early one morning a man was crossing the bridge on his way from the village of Daphnona to the capital city, when he met a tall young woman dressed in white. She took him by the hand and made him dance with her. He was foolish enough to speak and was immediately struck dumb. He recovered, however, some days after, thanks to the prayers and exorcisms of a priest.

So too the sirens frequent an island near the coast of Italy and entice seamen by the sweetness of their song which is so bewitching that the listeners forget everything and die of hunger. In Homeric mythology there were only two sirens, later writers named three, and the number has since been augmented by those who loved "lords many and gods many."

Plato says there are three kinds of sirens—the celestial, the generative and the cathartic. The first are under the government of Jupiter, the second under the government of

Neptune, and the third under the government of Pluto. When the soul is in heaven, the sirens seek, by harmonic motion, to unite it to the divine life of the celestial host; and when in Hades, to conform them to the infernal regimen, but on earth they produce generation, of which the sea is emblematic.

We may tarry a little here to greet a beneficent class of sea-nymphs. These are the Nereids, fifty in number, named after Nereid, daughter of Nereus, the sea-god whose sway extended over the Ægean Sea. Camoens, in his *Lusiad*, has spiritualised their office, and he makes them the sea-guardians of the virtuous. According to a legend they went before the fleet of Vasco da Gama, and when the treacherous pilot supplied by the King of Mozambique steered his ship towards a sunken rock, these guardian nymphs pressed against the prow, lifting it from the water and turning it round.

To turn back to the malevolent spirits. At Dervinato, a village in the island of Chios, there is a fountain-head, or "water mother," the common Greek expression for a spring, called Plaghia, which is reputed to be the haunt of a Black Giant. This monster is a crafty demon of Oriental origin who lures the guileless to destruction by various stratagems, generally by assuming the form of a fair maid. He is a being mortally dreaded by the peasantry, and is not so often met with as the water-spirit.

There is also the Drakos, a cousin-german to the Black Giant. Like the Black Giant he also haunts the wells and works mischief on the people by withholding the water. This trick of the monster is alluded to in the following lines, which form the beginning of a song heard at Nigrita :—

Yonder at St. Theodore's, yonder at St. George's,
A fair was held, a great fair.
The space was narrow and the crowd was large.
The Drakos held back the water and the people were athirst,
Athirst was also a lady who was heavy with child.

In Greek legends the Drakos figures as a large uncouth monster akin to the Troll of Norse and the Ogre and Giant of British and Continental fairy tales. His simplicity of mind is only equalled by his might and he is easily bamboozled. He is also regarded as a performer of superhuman feats. As in Ireland there is a Giant's Causeway, so in Macedonia we find a "Drakos's Weight" (a big stone to the south of Nigrita), a "Drakos's Shovelful," (a mound of earth), a "Drakos's Tomb," a rock in the same neighbourhood, resembling a high-capped *Dervish*, resting against the slope of the hill, and a "Drakos's Quoits," two solitary rocks standing in the plain of Serres.

Various superstitions concerning drowning can be easily traced to this belief in mischievous water-spirits. These spirits demand human sacrifices and those who get drowned are supposed to be their victims. Thus, when in Germany a person comes by his death from drowning, the Germans say: "The river-spirit claims his annual sacrifice," or that "the nix has taken the drowned man." In India *pujas* are invariably offered to propitiate these spirits before any member of a family starts on a journey involving the crossing of the deep or of the rivers. While passing over creeks and streams, travellers on the Indian Railways will notice even to-day many a traveller, Hindu and Parsi, male and female, throwing from the train cocoanuts, sugar and flowers in the water in the devout hope of averting accidents. The followers of Islam, however, believe that God Almighty would, by reason of the benign influence of His name, preserve them from drowning. Therefore, whilst starting on a voyage they chant the following couplet from Surah Nooh of the *Koran*, as a protective from drowning :—

*Bismillaheh Majriha O Mursaha inna Rabi-ul-ghafur ul-Rahim*, meaning, "The moving and stopping (of this boat, Noah's Ark) depends upon the influence of the Name of God, for, in truth, our Lord is pre-eminently a Pardoner of sins and merciful."

In the same way Bengal boatmen cry "Badar," "Badar," when a boat is in danger of capsizing, in the hope that the saint Khwaja Khizr would protect them.

Others wear amulets to ward off the danger of drowning. In "Unbeaten Tracks in Japan," Miss Bird says that the amulet which saves the Japs from drowning is "a certain cure for choking, if courageously swallowed." Some sailors believe that if a portion of the cowl which covers the face of some children at the time of birth be worn as an amulet round the neck, the person wearing it will not get drowned, while some Bengalees believe that if a person accidentally eats ants along with sweets or any foodstuff, he will not get drowned.[1]

Once, however, a man is in the grip of the water-spirit, to venture to save him is, according to various widespread beliefs, sure to bring on disaster. In several places, therefore, including Great Britain, people show great reluctance to save a drowning person, because, as suggested by Tylor, they fear the vengeance of the water-spirit, who would, in consequence, be deprived of his prey.

Thus we gather from Tudor's *Orkney and Shetland* that amongst the seamen of those places it was deemed unlucky to rescue persons from drowning since it was held as a matter of religious faith that the sea was entitled to certain victims, and that, if deprived, it would avenge itself on those who interfere. The still more cautious and considerate people in the Solomon Islands go a step further. If a man accidentally falls into the river and a shark attacks him, he is not allowed to escape. If he does succeed in eluding the shark, his fellow-tribesmen will throw him back to his doom, believing him to be marked out for sacrifice to the god of the river.[2]

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[1] Journal of the Anthropological Society of Bombay, Vol. III., No. 5.

[2] Codrington, The Melanesians.

In his "Folk Medicine" Black accounts for this superstition on the ground that it is believed that the spirits of people who have died a violent death may return to earth if they can find a substitute and that hence the soul of the last dead man would feel insulted or injured by anyone preventing another from taking his place. Some people on the other hand believe that the reluctance to save drowning persons is due to the belief that the person rescued from being drowned would inflict mischief on the man who saves his life. It would seem from Walter Scott's novel[1] that this belief prevailed in Scotland. In it asks the pedlar Bryce: "Are you mad? You that have lived so long in Zetland to risk the saving of a drowning man? Wot ye not if we bring him to life again, he will be sure to do you capital injury?"

This superstition appears to have been confined to the West only. In the East, luckily, there is no such antipathy to extend a helping hand to the drowning. It may be mentioned, however, that in his *Popular Religion and Folklore of Northern India* Crooke seems to suggest that this feeling is also common in India, but he cites no examples although he gives several instances and quotes several authorities concerning the Western ideas on the subject. We, however, find no such instance recorded anywhere. In the year 1893 Mr. Sarat Chandra Mitra read before the Anthropological Society of Bombay a paper on some superstitions regarding drowning. He quoted several Western examples concerning the aversion to save drowning people but gave no parallel for any of these from the folklore of Bengal and Upper India with which he is intimately familiar. If such antipathy did exist, that indefatigable student of Indian folklore would have certainly heard of it.

Crooke appears to have confounded two separate, though analogous, ideas, and to have assumed that the prevalence of one connotes the existence of the other. There is, of course,

[1] The Pirate.

abundant evidence in Indian folklore to show that it was believed throughout this country that the spirits of those persons who got drowned wandered for a hundred years if their corpses were not properly and solemnly buried with all the requisite ceremonies. The spirits of the drowned are, therefore, believed to haunt those rivers and wells and tanks in which they have found their graves, just as the fisher-folk of England believed that the spirits of the sailors who were drowned by a shipwreck frequented those parts of the shores near which the shipwreck took place. In his "Romances in the West of England" Hunt refers to these superstitions. The mere prevalence, however, of one of the superstitious beliefs of the same class in two countries does not warrant the sweeping assertion that the other beliefs also prevail in both the countries

## CHAPTER XII

## RIVER WRAITHS.

The worst of all the phantom streams in India is the dread *Vaitarani*, the river of death, which is localized in Orissa and which pours its stream of ordure and blood on the confines of the realm of Yama.[1] Ill fares the man who in that dread hour lacks the aid of a priest and the holy cow to help him to the other shore. But the Indian water furies are easily propitiated. Goats, or fish, or fowl, or even flowers and cocoanuts are enough to appease them. Thus the Tapti and the Sutlej receive goats, whereas the Jata Rohini, the Deo infesting the Karsa, a river in Mirzapur, is pleased with a fish caught by the Buiga and presented to him. Many of the continental water deities, however, must needs have human sacrifices, just as the African river spirit Prah, who must have every year in October two human sacrifices, one male and one female. Thus in England the River Tees, the Skerne, and the Ribble have each a sprite, who, in popular belief, demands human victims. The Ribble's sprite is known by the name of Peg O' Nell, and a spring in the grounds of Waddow bears her name and is graced by a stone image, now headless, which, according to Sir Laurence Gomme,[2] is said to represent her. A tradition connects the Peg O' Nell

[1] W. Crooke: Popular Religion and Folklore of Northern India. In this work the name of the river is given as *Vaitarani*. It must not, however, be mistaken for the Vaitarana, the largest of the Thana rivers, which is mentioned in the *Mahabharat* as one of the four sacred streams. The sacredness of its source, so near the spring of the holy Godaveri, attracted to the banks of the Vaitarana some of the first Aryan settlers. Seers like Narad, Vashistha and Indra betook themselves to the spring and the superhuman Yakshas, Gandharvas and Kinnars were attracted to its waters for bathing and sacrifice.

[2] W. Ethnology in Folklore.

with an ill-used servant at Waddow Hall, who, in revenge for her mistress's successful malediction in causing her death, was inexorable in demanding every seven years a life to be quenched in the waters of the Ribble. "Peg's night" was the closing night of the septenniate, and when it came round, unless a bird, a cat, or a dog was drowned in the stream, some human being was certain to fall a victim there.

The sprite of the Tees is called Peg Powler, a sort of Lorelei, says Henderson in his *Folklore of Northern Counties*, with green tresses and an insatiable desire for human life. Children were warned from playing on the banks of this river by threats that Peg Powler would drag them into the water.

A horrid Kelpie or water-horse is said to infest the Yore, near Middleham. Every evening he rises from the stream and ramps along the meadows searching for prey, and it is believed that the Kelpie claims at least one human victim annually.

The River Spey must also have at least one victim yearly, while

> Blood-thirsty Dee
> Each year needs three.

Another curious belief concerning the Dee may also be noted. In his *Itinerary through Wales* Giraldus Cambrensis states that the inhabitants of places near Chester assert that the waters of the river change their fords every month and that as it inclines more towards England or Wales they can with certainty prognosticate which nation will be successful or unfortunate during the year.

The saying runs that "St. John the Baptist must have a runner, must have a swimmer, must have a climber." As if this were not enough, in Cologne he requires no less than seven swimmers and seven climbers.

Even to this day some German rivers, such as the Saale and the Spree, require their victims on Midsummer Day. During that

perilous season people are careful not to bathe in it. Again, where the beautiful Neckar flows under the ruins of Heidleberg Castle, the spirit of the river seeks to drown three persons, one on Midsummer Eve, one on Midsummer Day, and one on the day after. On these nights if you hear a shriek, as of a drowning man or woman from the water, beware of running to the rescue; for it is only the water-fairy shrieking to lure you to your doom. In Voigtland it was formerly the practice to set up a fine May tree, adorned with all kinds of things, on *St. John's Day*. The people danced round it, and when the lads had fetched down the things with which it was tricked out, the tree was thrown into the water. But before this was done, they sought out somebody whom they treated in the same manner, and the victim of this horseplay was called "the John." The brawls and disorders, which this custom provoked, led to a suppression of the whole ceremony which was obviously only a modification of an older custom of actually drowning a human being. At Rotenberg on the Neckar people throw a loaf of bread into the water on St. John's Day, otherwise the river-god would grow angry and carry away a man. Elsewhere, however, the water-sprite is content with flowers. In Bohemia people cast garlands in the water on Midsummer Eve and if the water-sprite pulls one of them down, it is a sign that the person who threw the garland in will die. In the villages of Hesse the girl who first comes to a well early in the morning of Midsummer Day places on the mouth of the well a gay garland of many sorts of flowers culled by her from fields and meadows. Sometimes a number of such garlands are twined together to form a crown with which the well is decked. At Fluda, in addition to the floral decorations of the wells, the neighbours choose a Lord of the Wells and announce his election by sending him a great nosegay of flowers. His house is decorated with green boughs and children walk in procession to it. He goes from house to house collecting materials for a feast, of which the neighbours partake on the following

Sunday. What the other duties of the Lord of Wells may be, we are not told. We may however conjecture, says Sir James Frazer, that in old days he had to see to it that the spirits of the water received their dues from men and maidens on that important day.[1]

In those moments of the civilized man's life when he casts off hard dull science, and returns to childhood's fancy, the world-old book of animated nature is open to him anew. Then, says Tylor, the well-worn thoughts come back fresh to him, of the stream's life that is so like his own; once more he can see the rill leap down the hillside like a child, to wander playing among the flowers; or can follow it as, grown to a river, it rushes through a mountain gorge, henceforth in sluggish strength to carry heavy burdens across the plain. In all that water does, the poet's fancy can discern its personality of life. It gives fish to the fisher, and crops to the husbandman; it swells in fury and lays waste the land; it grips the bather with chill and cramp, and holds with inexorable grasp its drowning victim:—

"Tweed said to Till,
'What gars ye rin sae still?'
Till said to Tweed,
'Though ye rin wi' speed,
And I rin slaw,
Yet, where ye drown ae man,
I drown twa.'"

What ethnography has to teach of that great element of the religion of mankind, the worship of well and lake, brook and river, is simply this that what is poetry to us was philosophy to early man; that to his mind water acted not by laws of force, but by life and will; that the water-spirits of primeval mythology are as souls which cause the water's rush and rest, its kindness and its cruelty; that lastly man finds, in the beings which

[1] The Golden Bough, Vol. II.

with such power can work him weal and woe, deities with a wider influence over his life, deities to be feared and loved, to be prayed to and praised and propitiated with sacrificial gifts.[1]

"In Australia," continues Tylor, "special water-demons infest pools and watering places. In the native theory of disease and death, no personage is more prominent than the water-spirit, which afflicts those who go into unlawful pools or bathe at unlawful times, the creature which causes women to pine and die, and whose very presence is death to the beholder, save to the native doctors, who may visit the water-spirit's subaqueous abode and return with bleared eyes and wet clothes to tell the wonders of their stay. It would seem that creatures with such attributes come naturally into the category of spiritual beings, but in such stories as that of the bunyip living in the lakes and rivers and seen floating as big as a calf, which carries off native women to his retreat below the waters, there appears that confusion between the spiritual water-demon and the material water-monster, which runs on into the midst of European mythology in such conceptions as that of the water-kelpie and the sea-serpent."

The same confusion of ideas is seen in the Macedonian ballad of the Haunted Well. Here too the spirit or demon of the well is confounded with the water-serpent. The ballad, as quoted in Mr. Abbott's *Macedonian Folklore*, runs as follows :—

## THE HAUNTED WELL.

Four and five, nine brothers,
Eighteen cousins, lads of little luck:
A message came to them from the King, bidding them
To go forth and fight in the far-off land of the Franks:
"Thy blessing, mother, that we may go forth!"
"May ye go forth nine brothers and come back eight;
May John the youngest never return!"

[1] Primitive Culture, Vol. II.

They set forth, and as they crossed the vast plain,
They lived forty days without bread,
Forty-five more without water,
And then they found a dear little fount; but it was a spirit-haunted well:
'Twas thirty fathoms in depth; in breadth twenty,
"Halt, dear brothers and let us cast lots,
He on whom the lot will fall, let him go in,"
The lot falls on John, the youngest.
They bind John and let him down:
"Draw, dear brothers, draw me out,
Here there is no water; but only a Spirit."
"We are drawing, John, we are drawing; but thou stirrest not"
"The serpent has wound itself round my body, the Spirit is holding me.
Come, set the Black One also to help you."
When the Black One heard, he neighed loud.
He reared on his haunches to draw him out.
When he drew out his arms, the mountains gleamed,
He draws out his sword also, and the sea gleamed.
They drew out John together with the spirit,
They lifted their knives to cut it asunder,
But instead of cutting the Spirit they cut the rope,
And John falls in together with the Spirit:
"Leave me, brothers, leave me and go home,
Do not tell my dear mother that I am dead,
Tell her, brothers, that I am married,
That I have taken the tombstone for a mother-in-law, Black Earth for a wife,
And the fine grass blades all for brothers and sisters-in-law."

The maleficent deities are also responsible for floods. When therefore, heavy floods threatened a village or a city in Gujarat, the king or the headman used to go in procession to propitiate the river with flowers, cocoanuts, and other offerings, so that the floods should subside. Similarly, in the Punjab, when a village is in danger of being flooded, the headman makes an offering of a cocoanut and a rupee to the flood-demon. The cocoanut represents the head of a human being and is believed to be acceptable to the water-demon in lieu of a human victim.

The headman stands in the water and holds the offering in his hand. When the flood rises high enough to wash the offering from his hand, it is understood that the waters will abate. Some people throw seven handfuls of boiled wheat and sugar into the stream and distribute the remainder among the persons present. Some take a male buffalo, a horse, or a ram, and after boring the right ear of the victim, throw it into the water. If the victim is a horse, it is saddled before it is offered.

In Bengal goats are sacrificed to propitiate the river-goddess in her malignant form when she devastates the land with floods or engulfs the swimmers. The goats are often thrown alive into the water and are taken out by men of the boatman caste, who eat their flesh. Many ascetics perform a special penance in her honour, which consists in spending every night in the month of January, when the cold is intense, seated on a small platform erected over the river and engaged in such prayer and meditation as their sufferings from the cold will allow.[1] Crooke says that when the town and temples at Hardwar were in imminent danger during the Gohna flood, the Brahmans poured vessels of milk, rice and flowers into the waters of Mother Ganges and prayed to her to spare them. Similarly, a story is related in the Folklore Notes of Gujarat of the occurrence of heavy floods in a village in the Jalalpur *taluka*, when a certain lady placed an earthern vessel (ordinarily used for curdling milk), containing *ghee*, afloat on the floods, whereupon the waters were at once seen to recede.

A few years ago the river Musi overflowed and caused terrible destruction. His Highness the Nizam thereupon went to the river, took off his turban, and threw it into the water in the hope that such submissiveness of a prince might appease the wrath of the river.[2]

[1] Primitive Semitic Religion.

[2] We may contrast with these examples the following illustration of punishing the gods and demi-gods for tolerating a tempest. It is quoted by Herbert Spencer in his "Study of Sociology," from Captain Burton's account of Goa to show how awe of power sways men's religious beliefs: —

"A pot of oil with a lighted wick was placed every night by the half-bred Portuguese Indians, before the painted doll, the patron saint of the boat in which we sailed from Goa. One evening, as the weather appeared likely to be squally, we observed that the usual compliment was not offered to the patron, and had the curiosity to inquire why. 'Why,' vociferated the tindal (captain), indignantly, 'if that chap can't keep the sky clear, he shall have neither oil nor wick from me, d—n him!' 'But I



Ocean-Worship.



*Narali Purnima* or Cocoanut Day.

The calamity of floods should not, however, be exclusively attributed to sheer demoniacal influence of malignant spirits. It may, in some cases, be due to the offence given to patron saints of water. Curtiss relates,[1] on the authority of Rev. J. Steward Crawford, an old resident in Syria, a remarkable incident which occurred at Nebk. The town derives its water-supply from a series of wells connected with one another. Once, owing to heavy rains, there came a succession of three floods which washed away the wells which had been repaired after each catastrophe. This left no room for doubt that the *Vali* of the wells had been offended. They began to ascertain the reason and discovered that the sacrifices which had been offered to the saint at an annual festival had been intermitted, that people used to perform their ablutions in a portion of the stream which was inside of the courtyard of the *makam* (shrine), thus defiling it, and that a dead body had been carried across the stream. All this had angered the saint. Sacrifices were, therefore, offered to propitiate him. A number of sheep were stationed over the stream and their throats were cut so that the blood would run into the water.

It is refreshing to turn from these river wraiths to the spirits of the sea, who are more powerful but, less exacting. A cocoanut is enough to keep them in good humour, and a special day is named for this offering, called *Narali Purnima*, or Cocoanut Holiday. On that day multitudes of people flock to the sea-shore in Bombay to offer their *puja* to the sea to keep it quiet after the monsoon. The Brahmin first offers prayers, then the votary throws into the sea the holy water which the Brahmin pours into the hollow of his hands, then some red lead, then a few flowers and some rice, and last of all the cocoanut. The safety of the seas during the fair season is thus insured.

should have supposed that in the hour of danger you would have paid him more than usual attention?' 'The fact is, Sahib, "I have found out that the fellow is not worth his salt: the last time we had an infernal squall with him on board, and if he does not keep this one off, I'll just throw him overboard, and take to Santa Caterina; hang me, if I don't—the brother-in-law!" " [Brother-in-law, a common term of insult.]

[1] Primitive Semitic Religion.

## CHAPTER XIII.

## WHO WERE THE WATER DEMONS?

Whence arose the fear of evil spirits? Who were those water-demons? Both philology and history confirm the view that the *Devas* or demons of old were in many cases either the conquered aborigines of the various lands in which the ancient Aryans settled themselves, or hostile races dwelling along their frontiers. Out of this hostility of races coming in close contact with one another sprang various superstitions. In some cases the armies of the aborigines were represented as accompanied by their own guardian spirits, who waged war upon the new-comers and who were therefore regarded as demoniacal. In other cases, the aborigines were themselves credited with the power of exercising demon functions or assuming demon forms. Thus the people of Iran believed that the land of Turan was full of demons. This influence of the conquered people did not die out after the struggle with them was over. Not only did the aborigines continue to believe in their own demoniacal powers and to observe their old rites and customs in the new régime, but they also spread the beliefs in many ways among their conquerors.

All untoward occurrences and unusual natural phenomena thus came to be attributed to the malignant action of those evil spirits. Storms, floods, famines, disease and death all proceeded from the *Devas*, who in the *Yasna Haptanhaiti* of the Zoroastrians are described as "the wicked, bad, wrongful originators of mischief, the most baneful, destructive and basest of beings." Professor Robertson Smith relegates demonism to the position of a cult hostile to and separate from the tribal beliefs of early people and Mr. Walhouse points out [1] that these beliefs in demons "belong to the Turanian races and are antagonistic to the Aryan genius and feelings."

[1] *Journal of the Anthropological Institute*, Vol. IV.

No doubt, Max Müller holds a different view. He considers that there is no difficulty in tracing a belief in evil, unclean and maleficent spirits, such as abound in Atharva-Veda, to the same soil which produced a faith in good and beneficent spirits. "We need not go for them," says he, "to the original inhabitants of India or the Blacks of Australia. Some of the great Vedic gods like Rudra and the Maruts often assume a double aspect They are unkind as well as kind, they cause disease though they likewise heal them. We have plenty of evil spirits in the Veda, such as Vritras, Rakshasas, Yâmdhânas, Pisâkas. Of course, nothing is easier than to say that they were borrowed from the native races of India, but this, which was formerly a very favourite expedient, would hardly commend itself now to any serious scholar, excepting always the cases where Dravidian words can actually be discovered in Sanscrit."

These comments, however, merely contain a warning not to stretch too widely a partial explanation of the origin of evil spirits. The race-origin of the lesser malignant spirits may not account for the existence of the Vedic giants and demons. Neither has anyone attempted to do so. There is, however, no doubt that several of the myths of *bhuts* and *dâkans*, giants and dwarfs, are connected with traditions of hostile races. Folklore throws considerable light on this question and a good deal of evidence has been brought forward by Grimm and other folk-lorists. Tylor has endorsed this evidence and the influence of the hostility of races on the beliefs of people in many lands is very skilfully examined by Sir Laurence Gomme in a chapter entitled the "Mythic influence of a conquered race" in his *Ethnology of Folklore*, and also in a chapter on "Ethnological conditions" in his later work, *Folklore as an Historical Science*. For our present purpose one or two examples from Indian Folklore will suffice. On Bombay side, when a person is possessed, generally the evil spirit is of a low caste, a Mahar, or Bhangbi or a Mochi or a Pinjari. The *dâkans* (witches) who haunt our way-side wells and trees and cemeteries also belong

to such low castes, as Kolis, Vaghris and Charans. The mountain ranges and jungle tracts of Southern India are still inhabited by semi-savage tribes, who, there is good reason to believe, once held the fertile open plains. As pointed out by Walhouse in the *Journal of the Anthropological Society*, the contempt and loathing in which they are ordinarily held, are curiously tinctured with superstitious fear; for they are believed to possess secret powers of magic and witchcraft and influence with the old malignant deities of the soil who can direct good or evil fortune. To this day the people of Chota Nagpur believe that the Moondahs possess powers of sorcery and can transform themselves into tigers and other beasts of prey with a view to devouring their enemies. Similarly, the Kathodis are believed to transform themselves into tigers. Many closely parallel beliefs can be quoted from the history of demonism in the western world and Sir Laurencee Gomme points out that the general characteristics of the superstitions brought about by the contact between the Aryan conquerors of India and the non-Aryan aborigines are also represented in the cult of European witchcraft. Underneath the emblems of the foreign civilisation lie the traditional custom and belief, "the attributes of the native uncivilisation."

A notable illustration is given by Evans Wentz in *Fairy Faith in Celtic Countries*. The only true Cornish Fairy, says the author, is the Piksy, of the race which is the *Pobel Vean* or Little People, and the Spriggan is only one of his aspects. The Piksy would seem to be the "Brownie" of the Lowland Scot, the *Duine Sith* of the Highlanders, and if we may judge from an interesting note in Scott's *Pirate*, the "Peight" of the Orkneys. If *Duine Sith* really means "the Folk of the Mounds (burrows)," not the "People of Peace," it is possible that there is something in the theory that Brownie, *Duine Sith*, and "Peight," which is Pict, are only in their origin ways of expressing the little dark-complexioned aboriginal folk who were supposed to inhabit the burrows, cromlechs, and allies couvertes, and whose cunning,

their only effective weapon against the mere strength of the Aryan invader, earned them a reputation for magical powers.[1]

Let us now see how far this view of the case helps us in understanding the Parsi beliefs in the Mahomedan guardian spirits of wells, to which reference has already been made. The relations of the Parsis with the Hindus and Mahomedans in the land of their adoption were not exactly those of conquered aborigines to the conquerors, but were, until the advent of the English, practically the same as those of subject races to the rulers. It was, however, no case of contact with a higher culture, rather it was the case of assimilation of a ruder culture. No doubt, the Parsis had taken to India from their ancient home a belief in the existence of a presiding genius of water. That, however, was a belief considerably different from that which in India gave the water-spirits a local habitation and a name. But by long contact with the Hindus and Mahomedans the community came to believe in several local deities and absorbed several local rituals. No doubt, the primary factor in inducing this recognition and worship of local deities was the fear of their power to do harm, but with it must also have been blended the desire to please the neighbouring communities and the hope of receiving favours at the hands of the spirits if properly adored and propitiated.

This it was that seems to have led many a Parsi in the mofussil to offer oil at the temple of *Hanuman* or to take flowers to the shrines of Mahomedan saints, whose aid they sought and who did not fail to appear to them, warning them and directing them, mostly in dreams. When they went to Bombay they had already absorbed the Hindu ideas concerning the spirits lurking in or near deserted tanks and wells and regarded them as the haunts of evil spirits such as *dakans* and *sankhinis*, *bhuts* and *prets*. When, however, they dug wells in their own houses, in the absence of any well-spirit in the Zoroastrian pantheon and in the absence of any Hindu guardian-

[1] W. Crooke: Natives of Northern India.

spirits of household wells, they appear to have invariably peopled their private wells with *sayyids* and *pirs* in whose virtues they had already come to believe and whom they had already venerated at their shrines and whom it was thus convenient for them to honour in their own houses by giving them a *sthan* or *thanak* in their wells.

Thus we see that what was at first a purely Scriptural belief in the sanctity of water and its presiding genius is now a medley of many divergent elements owing to the fusion of divers local traditions with the fundamental tribal belief during the long intercourse of the community with the Hindus and Mahomedans. There is no country in the world where people live under more varied social and religious conditions and where they are more exposed to the influence of neighbours than in India and of all the cities of this cosmopolitan country there is none more cosmopolitan than the city of Bombay.

Possibly, if we carry on local research in the Bombay Presidency and try to localise the beliefs and customs concerning well-worship, a good deal of fresh light may be thrown on this question. The work is by no means very difficult and with the aid of European folklorists, who have already shown us the way, it should be easy to carry on research throughout India. Sir Laurence Gomme, for instance, has given us in a luminous chapter on the localisation of primitive beliefs, a very skilful analysis of the different phases in which water-worship is still found in the United Kingdom. All the survivals of this cult he has allocated and explained by their ethnological bearing.

## CHAPTER XIV.

## ANALYSIS OF THE BRITISH CULTS.

Commencing with the Teutonic centres of England, Sir Laurence Gomme shows that the middle and south-eastern counties almost fix the boundary of one form of well-worship, a form which has lost all local colour, all distinct ritual, and remains only in the dedication of the well or spring to a saint of the Christian Church, in the tradition of its name as a "holy well," or else in the memory of some sort of reverence formerly paid to the waters, which in many cases are nameless. Proceeding from small beginnings where the survival of the ancient cult is represented by the simple idea of reverence for wells mostly dedicated to a Christian saint, he takes us through stages where a ceremonial is faintly traced in the well-dressing with garlands decked with flowers and ribbons, where shrubs and trees growing near the well are the recipients of offerings by devotees to the spirit of the well, where disease and sickness of all kinds are ministered to, where aid is sought against enemies, where the gift of rain is obtained, where the spirits appear in general forms as fairies and in specific form as animal or fish, and finally, it may be in anthropomorphic form as Christian saints, where priestesses attend the well to preside over the ceremonies. With the several variants overlapping at every stage and thus keeping the whole group of superstition and custom in touch, one section with another, he shows that there is every reason to identify this cult as the most widespread and the most lasting in connection with local natural objects. He points out, moreover, that it is in the Celtic-speaking districts where the rudest and most uncivilised ceremonial is extant, and further, that it is in the country of the Goidelic or earliest branch of the Celts, where this finds its most pronounced types.

To show how this may be translated into terms of ethnology he has given us the following table showing where the survivals of the cult are the most perfect, that is to say, less touched by the incoming civilisations which have swept over them :—

| | Form of worship. | | | | | Offerings. | | | Deity or spirit. | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Simple reverence. | Cure of disease. | Wishing and divination. | Rain producing. | Sun-worship influences. | Garland-dressing. | Pins. | Rag-bushes. | Saint. | Fairy. | Animal genius. | Human priest or priestess. |
| England :— | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Eastern and South-eastern. | + | | | | | | | | + | | | |
| Isle of Wight . | + | | | | | + | | | + | | | |
| Western (middle). | + | | | | | + | | | + | | | |
| Western .. | | + | + | | | + | + | | + | | | |
| Northern (a).. | | + | + | | | + | + | | + | | | |
| Do. (b).. | | + | + | | | | + | + | | + | | |
| Wales .. .. | | + | + | | + | | + | | | | + | + |
| Cornwall ... | | + | + | | + | | | | | | + | + |
| Ireland .. .. | | + | + | + | + | | | + | | | + | |
| Scotland... .. | | + | + | + | + | | | + | | | + | + |

It may be gathered from this table that the acts of simple reverence, garland-dressing, and dedication to a Christian saint are to be taken as the late expressions in popular tradition of the earlier and more primitive acts and practices tabulated above. Taking the more primitive elements as the basis, the author shows that the lowest point is obtained from English ground, which only rises into the primitive stage in the northern

countics where rag-bushes are found. On Welsh ground the highest point of primitive culture is the tradition of an animal guardian-spirit. On Irish ground the highest point is the identification of the well deity with the rain-god, while on Scottish ground the highest points recognisable elsewhere are accentuated in degree.

The author also shows that garland-dressing, pins and rag-bushes, the three forms in which offerings to the well-deities are made, are but variants of one primitive form—namely, the offerings of rags or parts of clothing upon bushes sacred to the well. This species of offering, according to a summary given by General Pitt-Rivers, extends throughout Northern Africa from west to east. Mungo Park mentions it in Western Africa; Sir Samuel Baker speaks of it on the confines of Abyssinia, and says that the people who practised it were unable to assign a reason for doing so; Burton also found the same custom in Arabia during his pilgrimage to Mecca; in Persia Sir William Ouseley saw a tree close to a large monolith covered with these rags, and he describes it as a practice appertaining to a religion long since proscribed in that country; Colonel Leslie says that in the Dekkan and Ceylon the trees in the neighbourhood of wells may be seen covered with similar scraps of cotton; Dr. A Campbell speaks of it as being practised by the Limboos near Darjeeling in the Himalayas, where it is associated, as in Ireland, with large heaps of stones; and Huc in his travels mentions it among the Tartars. We shall examine the ideas underlying the practice of rag-offering in different countries in a separate chapter. Meanwhile, the conclusion that Sir Laurence Gomme draws from this summary may be noted in his own words:—

"Here not only do we get evidence of the cult in an Aryan country like Persia being proscribed, but, as General Pitt-River observes, 'it is impossible to believe that so singular a custom as this, invariably associated with cairns, megalithic monuments, holy wells, or some such early Pagan institutions, could have arisen independently in all these countries.' That

the area over which it is found is coterminous with the area of the megalithic monuments, that these monuments take us back to pre-Aryan people and suggest the spread of this people over the area covered by their remains, are arguments in favour of a megalithic date for well-worship and rag-offerings."

This ramble of ours through many ages and many lands in search of evidence of water-worship may now be brought to a close. Let us now witness the ceremonies connected with the digging of wells and the different customs of decorating wells and the varied offerings proffered to the nymphs and spirits residing in the waters. With the picture that will be thus presented of Indian wells decked with *jalis* (trellis work) of flowers and illumined with *ghee*-lamps, their pavements strewn with cocoanuts, sugar and sweets and milk and *ghee*, and smeared with red lead in lieu of blood, but daubed also in some places with the blood of animal-sacrifice, it will be interesting to contrast the picture of English wells fantastically tapestried about with old rags and practically unlit and unembellished, save for a little garland-dressing here and there, and filled with pins and needles, buttons and coins.

# PART III.

## VARIED RITUALS AND OFFERINGS.



# CHAPTER XV.

## WATER-DIVINING AND WELL-OPENING CEREMONIES.

"Spring up, O well,
Sing ye to it:
Thou well dug by princes,
Sunk by the nobles of the people,
With the sceptre, with their staves
Out of the desert a gift."

This beautiful song of the well is taken from the Jewish scriptures. Budde believes that the song alludes to a custom by which when a well or spring was found, it was lightly covered over, and then opened by the Sheikhs in the presence of the clan and to the accompaniment of a song. In this way, by the fiction of having dug it, the well was regarded as the property of the clan. He thinks that a passage in Nilus (Migne, "Patrologia Graeca"), to which Goldziher has called attention, confirms this view. Nilus says that when the nomadic Arabs found a well they danced by it and sang songs to it. According to Kazivini when the water of the wells of Ilabistan failed, a feast was held at the source, with music and dancing, to induce it to flow again.

In India when a well is to be dug, an expert is first called to select a favourable site. To some experts such sites are revealed in dreams. Some possess the faculty of hearing the sound of water running underneath, others point out the sites by smelling out sweet water under ground. The Bombay Gazetteer bears testimony to the wonderful faculties of these experts. "Sites for wells," says the writer,[1] "are chosen with great success

[1] Bombay Gazetteer (Kathiawar) Vol. VIII.

by water-diviners, or *pánikals*, whose services can be engaged at the rate of Re. 1-4 a well. Their judgment is unerring and many instances are on record of their practical ability. They can also generally tell at what depth the spring will be tapped".

These sniffers are known as Bhonyesunghna in Gujarat and Cutch, and as Sunga in the Punjab, and they generally belong to a class of *Faqirs* gifted with this faculty. The Luniyas, a caste of navvies, are also endowed with these powers. In the Punjab a herd of goats is driven about in search of sites of deserted wells. When these goats arrive at the right spot, they lie down, and that is a signal for a search.

Water-diviners are not unknown in the West. One of the extraordinary incidents of the recent Gallipoli campaign was the discovery of water by a Kentish water-diviner at Suvla Bay. During the critical hours which followed the landing at the place in August 1915, the great problem for the officers was to find water on that parched land. The experts had examined the district and reported that there was no water to be got there, but Sapper Stephen Kelly, of the 3rd Australian Light Horse Brigade, a hydraulic engineer of Melbourne, possessed the gift for water-divining. While he was standing with Captain Shearen, a New Zealand Officer, in the line of communications, he cried out, "There's water here where we're standing." News of his reputation had reached Brigadier-General Hughes, who sent for him immediately and asked him if he could find water. The Sapper was confident of finding it. The Brigadier gave him a sporting chance and put a thousand men under his direction. Within a few hours he opened up a well which had been sunk. In a little more time he had thirty wells going with sufficient water to supply every man with a gallon a day and every mule with its six gallons, and this of pure cold spring water "instead of the lukewarm liquor from kerosene tins off the transport."

The army's engineers were astonished by Sapper Kelley's success, especially as he was without paper plans. When they asked him about it, he replied that it would take him about half the time to get the wells going that it would to draw up the plans. Sapper Kelly was a Kent man, born in Maidstone. He went out to Queensland when a small boy. At that time an old water-diviner arrived in the neighbourhood and tried his art in that locality. The boy trotted after the old man in his twistings and turnings about the paddock with a divining twig in his hand and when the old man found water, the boy "felt his nerves twitch and a thrill go through him that wasn't just excitement." He thought he would try too, and he did. From that moment he had practised his powers. At Suvla, he said, he got better results with a copper rod instead of the divining twig.

We are not aware of any ceremonies connected with the digging of wells in the West, but in India it is regarded as a very important function requiring care and caution and, above all, propitiation of the deities. A Brahmin is consulted as to the auspicious hour when the work of digging should commence. The auspicious days vary in different places. In Gujarat, Tuesdays and the days on which the earth sleeps are avoided; and the earth is supposed to be asleep on the 1st, the 7th, the 9th, the 10th, the 14th and the 24th days following a *Sankranti*, *i.e.*, the day on which the sun crosses from one constellation to another. With the exception of these days, a date is generally selected on which the *chandra-graha*, or the moon, is favourable to the constructor of the well.

On the appointed day, the water diviner, the constructor of the well, the Brahmin priest, and the labourers go to the place where the well is to be dug, and an image of the god *Ganpati*, the protector of all auspicious ceremonies, is first installed on the spot and worshipped with *panchamrit*, a punch or mixture of milk, curds, ghee, honey and sugar. A green-coloured piece of *atlas* (silk cloth), about two feet long, is then spread on the

spot, and a pound and a quarter of wheat, a cocoanut, betels, dates and copper coins are placed on it. A copper bowl filled with water and containing some silver or gold coins is also placed there. The mouth of the bowl is covered with the leaves of the mango tree and a cocoanut is placed over the leaves. After this the priest chants sacred hymns and asks his host to perform the *Khat* ceremonies.

These Khat-muhurt or Khat-puja must be performed before commencing the construction not only of wells, reservoirs and tanks, but also of all works above or under the ground, such as setting the *nankestambha*, or the first pillar of a marriage bower, or a bower for a thread ceremony, or laying the foundation-stone of a house or temple, or a sacrificial pit, or of a street, or fortress, or a city or a village. The earth-mother is then worshipped in the manner prescribed in the *shashtras* to propitiate her against interruptions in the completion of the work undertaken. The owner or the person interested in the new work pours a little water on the earth where the foundation-pit is to be dug, sprinkles red lead and *gulal* (red powder), places a betel-nut and a few precious coins, and digs out the first clod of earth himself. Rich persons use silver or golden spades and hoes when turning up the first clod. Among the usual offerings to *Ganpati* and to the earth on the occasion are curd, milk, honey, molasses, cocoanuts, dhana (a kind of spices), leaves of nagarval (a kind of creeper) and red lead. The expert who is called to choose a proper site for the well offers frankincense and a cocoanut to the spot, and lights a lamp thereon. After the *Khat* ceremonies are over, the host distributes sugar or molasses among those present and offers money to the expert who generally refuses to accept it and asks the host to dispose of it in charity. Even those who accept money give away a part of it in alms to the poor.

Occasionally, with a view to securing unobstructed completion of the work, the god *Ganpati* and the goddess *Jaladevi* are installed and worshipped daily, until water appears in the

well. Some people, however, install the goddess *Jaladevi* after the appearance of water, when a stone is taken out from the bottom of the well and is plastered with red lead to represent the goddess and is ceremoniously worshipped. When the construction of the well is complete, a ceremony called *Vastu* or *jal-ostsana* or water-festival is celebrated, Brahmins are entertained at a feast and *dakshina* is given.[1]

In the Punjab, the work of digging a well should begin on Sunday. On the previous Saturday night little bowls of water are placed round the proposed site, and the one which dries up the least marks the best site for the well. The circumference is then marked and the work of digging commenced, the central lump of earth being left intact. This clod of earth is cut out last and it is called *Khwajaji*, after Khwaja Khizr, the water-saint, and is worshipped. If it breaks, it is a bad omen, and a new site is selected a week later.

In the north-east a Pandit fixes the auspicious moment for sinking a well. The owner then worships Gauri, Ganesha, Shesha Naga, the world-serpent, the earth, the spade and the nine planets. Then facing in the direction in which, according to the directions of the Pandit, Shesha Naga is supposed to be lying at the time, he cuts five clods with the spade. When the workmen reach the point at which the wooden well-cush has to be fixed, the owner smears the cush in five places with red powder and tying dub-grass and a sacred thread to it, lowers it into its place. A fire sacrifice is then offered, and Brahmins are fed. When the well is ready, cow-dung, cow urine, milk, butter and Ganges water, leaves of sacred Tulsi and honey are thrown into the water before it is used. In the Konkan a golden cow is thrown into a newly built well as an offering to the water deities.[2]

[1] Folklore Notes, Vol. I—Gujarat.
[2] *Ibid*, Vol. II—Konkan.

But, according to Crookes, no well is considered lucky until the Salagrama, or the spiral ammonite sacred to Vishnu, is solemnly wedded to the Tulsi or basil plant, representing the garden or field which the well is intended to water. The rite is performed according to the standard marriage formula: the relations are assembled; the owner of the garden represents the bridegroom, while a kinsman or his wife stands for the bride. Gifts are given to Brahmins, a feast is held in the garden, and both the garden and the well may then be used without any danger.

# CHAPTER XVI.

## DECORATIONS AND OFFERINGS.

We have seen that the Indian method of venerating a well was to crown it with flowers, to cover it with *jalis* or trellis work of flowers, to illumine it with ghee-lamps placed in niches specially made for the purpose and to strew the pavement with cocoanuts, betel-nuts, sugar and sweets and milk and ghee and to smear it with red lead. We have also noticed that floral decoration and garland-dressing is an act of simple reverence, being a survival of the earlier and more primitive practices and ceremonials. The other offerings, however, particularly cocoanut, and the practice of smearing the pavement with red lead point to beliefs associating spirits with water, and these are survivals of the ancient cult of human and animal sacrifices offered to the water-spirit. The cocoanut, resembling a human head, is accepted by the spirits, in lieu of a human being, similarly red lead does duty for the blood of animal victims. The Germans hoodwink the water-spirit with another curious substitute and that is a loaf of bread. It is the practice to throw a loaf into the water at Rotenburg on the Neckar. If this offering is not given, the river-spirit would take away a man. The practice of placing lamps inside the well also points to spirit-beliefs. The lights, it is hoped, would scare away evil spirits from the water.

There is enough anthropological evidence to show that at one time human sacrifices were offered in east and west alike to the spirits of fire, earth and water. Numerous authorities may be cited. The Indian practices are well known. For continental examples we may select only one from Sir James Frazer's *Golden Bough* concerning the practice of burning humans beings in the fires. The most unequivocal traces of human sacrifices

offered on these occasions are those which, about a hundred years ago, still lingered at the Beltane fires in the Highlands of Scotland, that is, among a Celtic people who, situated in a remote corner of Europe and almost completely isolated from foreign influence, had till then conserved their old heathenism better than any other people in the west of Europe. "It is significant," says Sir James Frazer, "that human sacrifices by fire are known, on unquestionable evidence, to have been systematically practised by the Celts. The earliest description of these sacrifices has been bequeathed to us by Julius Caesar. As conqueror of the hitherto independent Celts of Gaul, Cæsar had ample opportunity of observing the national Celtic religion and manners, while these were still fresh and crisp from the native mint and had not yet been fused in the melting-pot of Roman civilization. . . The following seem to have been the main outlines of the custom. Condemned criminals were reserved by the Celts in order to be sacrificed to the gods at a great festival which took place once in every five years. The more there were of such victims, the greater was believed to be the fertility of the land. If there were not enough criminals to furnish victims, captives taken in war were immolated to supply the deficiency. When the time came, the victims were sacrificed by the Druids or priests, some they shot down with arrows, some they impaled, and some they burned alive in the following manner. Colossal images of wicker-work or of wood and grass were constructed; these were filled with live men, cattle and animals of other kinds; fire was then applied to the images, and they were burned with their living contents. Such were the great festivals held once every five years. But besides these quinquennial festivals, celebrated on so grand a scale and with, apparently, so large an expenditure of human life, it seems reasonable to suppose that festivals of the same sort, only on a lesser scale, were held annually, and that from these annual festivals are lineally descended some at least of the fire-festivals which, with their traces of human sacrifices, are still celebrated year by year in many parts of Europe."

Similarly, in pagan Europe water claimed its human victims on Midsummer Day. We have already seen that in England the spirits of the River Tees, the Skerne and the Ribble, the Spey and the Dee demand human victims. We have also seen how the river sprites in Germany transcend the rest of the spirits in Europe in their blood-thirstiness. We also learn from Tacitus that the ancient Germans offered human sacrifices. He tells us that the image of the goddess Nerthus, her vestments and chariot were washed in a certain lake, and that immediately afterwards the slaves who ministered to the goddess were swallowed by the lake. The statement may perhaps be understood to mean that the slaves were drowned as a sacrifice to the deity.

The next stage was that of animal sacrifices. It is well known that just as goats and buffaloes were sacrificed in India, so were bulls and calves offered to the deities in Europe. In Bombay cocks and goats are still offered to water. The wells on the continent, however, seldom receive animal offerings in these days. Only in one case, namely in the case of St. Tegla's Well, which is resorted to for the cure of epilepsy, we find the patient offering a cock or a hen. The usual offerings at other wells are rags and ribbons, pins and needles, nails and shells, buttons and coins, and sometimes bread and cheese. It will, therefore, be news to many that in Great Britain the lamb was the votive offering for water. Sir Laurence Gomme refers to this offering in a chapter on ethnic elements in custom and ritual, in which he compares certain ceremonies prevalent in India and Greece and other parts of Europe and argues from the strong line of parallel between the Indian ceremonies and those still observed in Europe as survivals of a forgotten and unrecognised cult that ceremonies which are demonstrably non-Aryan in India, even in the presence of Aryan people, must in original have been non-Aryan in Europe, though the race from whom they have descended is not at present identified by ethnologists. One of he customs selected by him for comparison is the Whitsuntide

custom in the parish of King's Teignton, Devonshire. Here is a description of that custom:—

"A lamb is drawn about the parish on Whitsun Monday in a cart covered with garlands of lilac, laburnum, and other flowers, when persons are requested to give something towards the animal and attendant expenses; on Tuesday it is then killed and roasted whole in the middle of the village. The lamb is then sold in slices to the poor at a cheap rate."

The origin of the custom is forgotten, but a tradition, supposed to trace back to heathen days, is to this effect: The village suffered from a dearth of water, when the inhabitants were advised by their priests to pray to the gods for water; whereupon the water sprang up spontaneously in a meadow about a third of a mile above the river, in an estate now called Rydon, amply sufficient to supply the wants of the place, and at present adequate, even in a dry summer, to work three mills. A lamb, it is said, has ever since that time been sacrificed as a votive thank-offering at Whitsuntide in the manner above mentioned.

The same ceremony, in a more primitive form, was observed at the village of Holne. On May-morning, before daybreak, the young men of the village used to assemble at a granite pillar in the centre of a field called the Ploy Field. They then proceeded to the moor, where they selected a ram lamb, and after running it down brought it in triumph to the Ploy Field, fastened it to the pillar, cut its throat, and then roasted it whole, skin, wool, etc. At Midday a struggle took place, at the risk of cut hands, for a slice, it being supposed to confer luck for the ensuing year on the fortunate devourer. As an act of gallantry the young men sometimes fought their way through the crowd to get a slice for the chosen amongst the young women, all of whom, in their best dresses, attended the Ram Feast as it was called.

In one of his odes Horace made a solemn promise that he would make a present of a very fine kid, some sweet wine and flowers to a noble fountain in his own Sabine Villa.

We have seen that even to-day the Parsis offer goats and fowl to the spirits of the well. The process of reasoning is the same. The Gujarati Hindu, however, shrinks from such slaughter. Nevertheless, the gods have to be propitiated. He therefore offers acceptable substitutes for animal victims, such as cocoanuts and red lead. Betelnuts, sugar and milk and ghee likewise keep the spirits in good humour.

Offerings of coins to the well-spirits are common in the East as in the West. What can be the explanation? Is the coin offered as a price for the boon that one expects to derive from the healing powers of the wells? That at any rate is the idea prompting the man bitten by a rabid dog when he goes to a well inhabited by a Vachharo, with two earthern cups filled with milk and with a pice in each, which he empties into the water. But quite a different and curious explanation of the offering is found in the *Folklore Notes of Gujarat*. "It is a belief among Hindus," says one of the informants of the late Mr. Jackson, "that to give alms in secret confers a great boon on the donor. Some of the orthodox people, therefore, throw pice into wells, considering it to be a kind of secret charity."

# CHAPTER XVII.

## RAG WELLS AND PIN WELLS.

The most singular feature of well-worship in Europe is the fantastic custom of offering rags at sacred wells, also pins and buttons, rusty nails and needles, and even shells and pebbles. Rag wells and pin wells abound in Great Britain and Ireland. Many references to these are found in the works of European folklorists. Sir Laurence Gomme has skilfully distributed them geographically and we may adopt his analysis.[1] In the middle and southern countries of England these practices have not survived, but in northern England one comes across several pin-wells. At Sefton in Lancashire it was customary for passers-by to drop into St. Helen's well a new pin for good luck or to secure the fulfilment of an expressed wish and by the turning of the pin-point to the north or to any other point of the compass conclusions were drawn as to the fidelity of lovers, date of marriage and other love matters. At Brindle is a well dedicated to St. Ellin, where on Patron day pins are thrown into the water. Such pin-wells also existed at Jarrow and Wooler in Northumberland, at Breyton Minchmore, Koyingham, and Mount Grace in Yorkshire.

At Great Cotes and Winterton in Lincolnshire, Newcastle and Benton in Northumberland, Newton Kyme, Thorp Arch, and Gargrave in Yorkshire, pieces of rag, cloth, or ribbon take the place of the pins, and are tied to bushes adjoining the wells, while near Newton, at the foot of Roseberry Topping, the shirt or shift of the devotee was thrown into the well, and according as it floated or sank so would the sickness leave or be fatal, while as an offering to the saint a rag of the shirt is torn off and left hanging on the briars thereabouts.

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Pin wells in Wales are met with at Rhosgoch in Montgomeryshire, St. Cynhafal's Well in Denbighhire, St. Barruc's Well on Barry Island, near Cardiff, Ffynon Gwynwy spring in Carnarvonshire, and a well near Penrhos. Reference has already been made to the cursing well of St. Aelian. Anyone who wished to inflict a curse upon an enemy resorted to the priestess of the well and got the name of the person proposed to be cursed registered in a book kept for the purpose. A pin was then dropped into the well in the name of the victim, and the curse was complete. Pin-wells and rag-wells are both represented in Cornwall as, for instance, at Pelynt, St. Austel and St. Roche, where pins are offered, and at Madron Well, where both pins and rags are offered.

In Ireland the offering of rags is a universal custom. Among examples of rag-wells may be mentioned Ardclinis; County Antrim, Errigall-Keroge, County Tyrone; Dungiven, St. Bartholomew's Well at Pilltown, County Waterford; and St. Brigid's Well at Cliffony, County Sligo.

About fifty years after the Reformation it was noted that the wells of Scotland were all "tapestried about with old rags." The best examples lasting to within modern times are to be found in the islands round the coast and in the northern shires, particularly in Banff, Aberdeen, Perth, Ross, and Caithness. At Kilmuir, in the Isle of Skye, at Loch Hiant, or Siant, there was "a shelf made in the wall of a contiguous enclosure" for placing thereon "the offerings of small rags, pins, and coloured threads to the divinity of the place." At St. Mouric's Well, on Malruba Isle, a rag was left on the bushes, nails stuck into an oak tree, or sometimes a copper coin driven in. At Toubirmore Well, in Gigha Isle, devotees were accustomed to leave "a piece of money, a needle, pin, or one of the prettiest variegated stones they could find," and at Tonbir Well, in Jura, they left "an offering of some small token, such as a pin, needle, farthing or the like."

In Banffshire, at Montblairie, "many still alive remember to have seen the impending boughs adorned with rags of linen and woollen garments, and the well enriched with farthings and bodles, the offerings of those who came from afar to the fountain." At Keith the well is near a stone circle, and some offering was always left by the devotees. In Aberdeenshire, at Frazerburgh, "the superstitious practice of leaving some small trifle" existed. In Perthshire at St. Fillan's Well, Comrie, the patients leave behind "some rags of linen or woollen cloth." In Caithness, at Dunnat, they throw a piece of money into the water, and at Wick they leave a piece of bread and cheese and a silver coin, which they alleged disappeared in some mysterious way. In Ross and Cromarty, at Alness, "pieces of coloured cloth were left as offerings"; at Cragnick an offering of a rag was suspended from a bramble bush overhanging the well; at Fodderty the devotees "always left on a neighbouring bush or tree a bit of coloured cloth or thread as a relic; and at Kiltearn shreds of clothing were hung on the surrounding trees. In Sutherlandshire, at Farr and at Loth, a coin was thrown into the well. In Dumfriesshire, at Penpont, a part of the dress was left as an offering, and many pieces have been seen "floating on the lake or scattered round the banks." In Kirkcudbrightshire at Buittle, "either money or clothes" was left, and in Renfrewshire, at Houston, "pieces of cloth were left as a present or offering to the saint on the bushes."

Macaulay in his History of St. Kilda, speaking of a consecrated well in that island called Tobirnimbuadh, or the spring of divers virtues, says: "Near the fountain stood an altar, on which the distressed votaries laid down their oblations. Before they could touch sacred water with any prospect of success, it was their constant practice to address the Genius of the place with supplication and prayers. No one approached him with empty hands. But the devotees were abundantly frugal. The offerings presented by them were the poorest acknowledgments that could be made to a superior being, from

whom they had either hopes or fears, shells and pebbles, rags of linen or stuffs worn out, pins, needles, or rusty nails, were generally all the tribute that was paid; and sometimes, though rarely enough, copper coins of the smallest value.[1]

What may be the ideas underlying these singular gifts?

Henderson explains in *Folklore* that "the country girls imagine that the well is in charge of a fairy or spirit who must be propitiated by some offering, and the pin presents itself as the most ready or convenient, besides having a special suitableness as being made of metal." Miss Marian Cox in her *Introduction to Folklore* says that the pins, coins, buttons and other objects found in wells, and generally considered to be offerings, may formerly have been vehicles of the diseases which patients have thought thus to throw off. This suggestion is probably based on the theory put forward by Sir John Rhys in regard to the rag-offerings at sacred wells. He believed that the object of placing these scraps of clothing at the wells was for transferring the disease from the sick person to some one else. The same explanation is vouchsafed in regard to the Indian custom of hoisting flags on trees. But whether or not this explanation is partially true in regard to the rag offerings, it is evidently untenable in regard to the presents of pins and buttons which are unquestionably offerings intended to please the well spirits.

In combating the opinion of Sir John Rhys, Sir Laurence Gomme gives in *Folklore as an Historical Science* a very significant example. "Among other items," says he, "I have come across an account of an Irish station, as it is called, at a sacred well, the details of which fully bear out my view as to the nature of the rags deposited at the shrine being offerings to the local deity. One of the devotees, in true Irish fashion, made his offering accompanied by the following

[1] Knowlson: The Orgins of Popular Superstitions and Customs.

words :—'To St. Columbkill—I offer up this button, a bit o' the waistband o' my own breeches, an' a taste o' my wife's petticoat, in remimbrance of us havin' made this holy station; an' may they rise up in glory to prove it for us in the last day.'"

"I shall not attempt," says the author, "to account for the presence of the usual Irish humour in this, to the devotee, most solemn offering; but I point out the undoubted nature of the offerings and their service in the identification of their owners—a service which implies their power to bear witness in spirit-land to the pilgrimage of those who deposited them during lifetime at the sacred well." Mr. Eden Phillpots in one of his Cornish stories, *Lying Prophets*, confirms this view. In that story rags are offered. "Just a rag tored off a petticoat or some such thing. They hanged 'em up round about on the thorn bushes, to show as they 'd a' done more for the good saint if they 'd had the power."

A few more authorities may be cited. These have been referred to in Knowlson's *Origins of Popular Superstitions and Customs*. Grose explains the custom in the following extract:—

> "Between the towns of Alten and Newton, near the foot of the Rosberrye Toppinge, there is a well dedicated to St. Oswald. The neighbours have an opinion that a shirt or shift, taken off a sick person and thrown into that well, will show whether the person will recover or die; for if it floated, it denoted the recovery of the party; if it sunk, there remained no hope of their life; and to reward the saint for his intelligence, *they tear off a rag of the shirt, and leave it hanging on the briers thereabouts* where, 'I have seen such numbers as might have made a fayre rheme in a paper-myll'."

There is an echo of this theory in the *Statistical Account of Scotland:* "A spring in the Moss of Melshach, of the chalybeats kind, is still in reputation among the common people. Its sanative qualities extend even to brutes. As this spring

probably obtained vogue at first in days of ignorance and superstition, it would appear that it became customary to leave at the well *part of the clothes of the sick and diseased* and harness of the cattle as an offering of gratitude to the divinity who bestowed healing virtues on its waters. And now, even though the superstitious principle no longer exists, the accustomed offerings are still presented."

Here is one more extract from the Statistical Account of Scotland :—

> "There is at Balmano a fine spring well, called St. John's Well, which in ancient times was held in great estimation. Numbers, who thought its waters of a sanative quality, brought their rickety children to be washed in its stream. Its water was likewise thought a sovereign remedy for sore eyes, which, by frequent washing, was supposed to cure them. To show their gratitude to the saint, and that he might be propitious to continue the virtues of the waters, they put into the well presents, not indeed of any great value, or such as would have been of the least service to him if he had stood in need of money, but such as they conceived the good and merciful apostle, who did not delight in costly oblations, could not fail to accept. The presents generally given were pins, needles, and rags taken from their clothes."

Professor Rhys himself suggests that a distinction is to be drawn between the rags hung on trees or near a well and the pins, which are so commonly thrown into the water itself. In his opinion only the rags were meant to be vehicles of disease. "If this opinion were correct", says Hartland, "one would expect to find both ceremonies performed by the same patient at the same well; he would throw in the pin and also place the rag on the bush, or wherever its proper place might be. The performance of both ceremonies, is, however, I think, exceptional. Where the pin or button is dropped into the well, the patient does not

trouble about the rag, and *vice versa*." Hartland is therefore inclined to think that the rags stand for entire articles of clothing which used to be deposited at an earlier time and he thinks that on the analogy of the part representing the whole the rags were intended to connect the worshipper with the deity. The reasoning underlying the rag-offerings, then, resolves itself into the following simple syllogism: My shirt or stocking, or a rag to represent it, stands for me; being placed upon a sacred bush or thrust into a sacred well it is in constant contact with divinity; the effluence of divinity, reaching and involving it therefore reaches and involves me.

A curious detail in regard to these rag-offerings is given by Mrs. Evans in reference to the rags tied on the bushes at St. Elian's well. These rags must be tied with wool. This detail is not mentioned by the various authorities whom we have referred to, and the reason for using wool remains to be explained. We know that with the Hindus as well as with the Parsis the sheep is a sacred animal. The use of woollen clothes is prescribed in certain Hindu rituals and the sacred thread of the Parsis, which he carries round his waist day and night, is made of sheep's wool. Probably the same idea led to the use of wool in the English custom of hanging up rags. If so, it affords a further ground for concluding that the rag was not a mere vehicle of disease but a grateful offering devoutly presented to the deity of the well or the tree.

Macedonian folklore furnishes further evidence in this behalf. Travellers in Macedonia often see newly-built fountains decorated with cotton or wool threads of many colours. These threads are torn by way-farers from their dress on beholding the fountain for the first time. "They alight and after having slaked their thirst in the waters of the fountain, leave these offerings as tokens of gratitude to the presiding nymph."[1]

[1] G. F. Abbott: Macedonian Folklore.

# CHAPTER XVIII.

## A MISUNDERSTOOD INDIAN CUSTOM.

In India no one would think of offering to the water-spirits such impure articles as pins and needles and nails, much less "rags tored off shirts and petticoats." It would be positive defilement of water. Sometimes, however, flags are seen hoisted near holy wells, and European travellers represent them as rag wells corresponding to those with which they are familiar in the west. There is, however, a good deal of difference between the two customs. In the first place these flags are not rags. They are made of new, unused cloth. It is a universal custom in India to put up *dhajas* or standards near shrines, sepulchres and sacred trees believed to harbour spirits. When there is such a shrine or tree near a well, a flag is hoisted at the spots. But it is done in honour, not of the water-spirit, but of the god or goddess installed in the shrine or of the spirit dwelling in the tree or of the saint buried in the vicinity. I have made personal enquiries and consulted authorities in search of evidence for rag wells in India, but have not come across any single instance. True, Crooke in his *Popular Religion and Folklore of Northern India*, makes the rather sweeping assertion that India supplies numerous examples of the custom of hanging up rags on trees or near sacred wells. Mention is also made in the *Folklore Notes of Gujarat* of flags that are sometimes hoisted near holy wells "in honour of the water-goddess Jaldevki." European folklorists are thereby led to docket these as illustrations of the prevalence of the cult of rag wells in India. But there is no evidence to show that rags are offered to wells. These authors are often misled by the incomplete data that they receive from their informants and in the absence of full particulars any such incident as a flag hoisted near a well is put forward as an example indicating the prevalence of

a custom altogether foreign to the conceptions and even repugnant to the sentiments of the Indian population.

No one mentions flags, all the folklorists talk of rags. Perhaps, there is an excuse for it, as the new flags, no doubt, get soiled in course of time. But, as pointed out above, it should not have been overlooked that a regular standard is invariably put up in honour of the presiding deity. It has no suggestion for disease-transference. All deities, whatever their specific virtues, get this honour without exception. The question, then, for consideration is, does the same idea of reverence account for the flags hoisted on trees? There is no doubt that the primary idea was the same, although in process of time superstitious people came to think that that was an offering demanded by the spirits living in the trees and that if the offering was not given, calamities would befall, particularly illness. For instance, one of these spirits is known by the name of *Chitharia* or *Ragged Pir*. He is supposed to dwell in such trees as the Khijado, *i.e.* Shami (Prosopis Spicigera) and Bawal, *i.e.*, Babhul (Acacia Arabica). It is a common belief that if a mother fails to offer a flag to such a holy tree while passing by it, her children's health and life are jeopardised. According to another belief, travellers, in order to accomplish their journey safely, offer flags to the trees reputed to be the dwelling-places of spirits, if they happen to come across them during the journey.

In the *Folklore Notes of Gujarat* several interesting examples of these beliefs and practices have been given and these may be transcribed here in the compiler's own words :—

"Some believe that both male and female spirits reside in the *Khijado, Bāval* and *Kerado* trees and throw rags over them with the object of preventing passers-by from cutting or removing the trees. Some pile stones round their stems and draw tridents over them with red lead and oil. If superstitious people come across such trees, they throw pieces of stones on the piles, believing them to be holy places, and think that by doing so they attain the merit of building a temple or shrine. A

belief runs that this pile should grow larger and larger day by day, and not be diminished. If the base of such a tree is not marked by a pile of stones, rags only are offered ; and if rags are not available, the devotee tears off a piece of his garment, however costly it may be, and dedicates it to the tree.

" Once a child saw its mother offering a rag to such a tree, and asked her the reason of the offering. The mother replied that her brother, that is the child's maternal uncle, dwelt in the tree. Hence a belief arose that a *chithario* (ragged) uncle dwells in such trees. Others assert that the *chithario pir* dwells in such trees, and they propitiate him by offering cocoanuts and burning frankincense before it.

" There is a *Khijado* tree near Sultanpur which is believed to be the residence of a demon *māmo*. This demon is propitiated by the offerings of rags.

" Some declare that travellers fix rags of worn-out clothes to the trees mentioned above in order that they may not be attacked by the evil spirits residing in them. Another belief is that the spirits of deceased ancestors residing in such trees get absolution through this form of devotion. It is also believed that a goddess called *chitharia devi* resides in such trees, and being pleased with these offerings, blesses childless females with children, and cures persons suffering from itch of their disease. There is a further belief that ragged travellers, by offering pieces of their clothes to the *Khijado*, *Baval* or *Kerado* trees, are blessed in return with good clothes.

" Some believe that Hanumān, the lord of spirits, resides in certain trees. They call him *chithario* or ragged Hanumān. All passers-by offer rags to the trees inhabited by him There is such a tree near the station of Shirei. There is a tamarind tree on the road from Tamnagar to Khantalia which is believed to be the residence of *chithario* Hanumān and receives similar offerings. Another tamarind tree of this description is near Marad and there is a *Khijado* tree on the road between Kalavad and Vavadi which is similarly treated.

"It is related by some people that in deserts trees are rare and the summer heat is oppressive. To the travellers passing through such deserts the only place of rest is in the shadow of a solitary tree that is to be met occasionally. In order that no harm be done to such trees, some people have given currency to the belief that a spirit called *māmo* dwells in such trees and expects the offering of a rag and a pice at the hands of every passer-by.

"In some places, the *Boṛīdi* (jujube), *Pipal*, *Vad* (banyan) and the sweet basil receive offerings of a pice and a betelnut from travellers, while the *Khijado* and *Bāval* are given rags."

In all these instances we notice the confusion of rags with flags, but they unmistakably establish the point that the idea underlying the offering is that of propitiating the spirit. A few more instances may be cited from Crooke's *Popular Religion and Folklore of Northern India*. "Among the Mirzapur Korwas the Baiga hangs rags on the trees which shade the village shrine, as a charm to bring health and good luck. These rag shrines are to be found all over the country, and are generally known as *Chithariya* or *Chithraiya Bhawani*, 'Our Lady of Tatters.' So, in the Punjab the trees on which rags are hung are named after Lingri Pir or the rag saint. The same custom prevails at various Himalayan shrines and at the Vastra Harana or sacred tree at Bindraban near Mathura which is now invested with a special legend, as commemorating the place where Krishna carried off the clothes of the milkmaids when they were bathing, an incident which constantly appears in both European and Indian folklore. In Berar a heap of stones daubed with red and placed under a tree fluttering with rag represents Chindiya Deo or 'the Lord of Tatters,' where, if you present a rag in due season, you may chance to get new clothes."

Crooke's authority for this last instance is the *Gazetteer*, but as indicated above these authorities have all missed the point that the original conception was to honour the tree-spirit and that these flags are hoisted either as a mark of reverence or

as a thank-offering for cures from diseases and other boons and further that these are regular flags and not scraps of shirts and petticoats fixed on bushes or hung on trees, as in Europe. During my recent journey from Rawalpindi to Kashmir I saw several trees the boughs of which were decked with flags of white and red cloth. In Baluchistan also I saw a good many trees similarly decked with flags. In each case I found that there was a grave of a saint underneath or close by the tree and that the flags were hoisted in honour of the saint. There was no suggestion of disease-transference, although the villagers admitted that it was customary to offer these flags if, in response to a prayer to the saint or a vow, any ailment was cured. Everywhere the explanation given was the same. The flag was presented to the saint only and solely as a thank-offering for a wish fulfilled.

The cult of rag offering is believed to extend throughout Africa from west to east. Park in his *Travels in the Interior of Africa* says: "The company advanced as far as a large tree called by the natives Neema Toba. It had a very singular appearance, being covered with innumerable rags or scraps of cloth, which persons travelling across the wilderness had at different times tied to its branches, a custom so generally followed that no one passes it without hanging up something." Park adds that he also followed the example, and suspended a handsome piece of cloth on one of the boughs. Burton found the custom prevailing in Arabia and Sir William Ouseley saw a tree close to a large monolith covered with rags. Ferrier in his *Caravan Journeys* says that these rags are fixed on bushes in Persia in the name of Imam Raza. It is believed that the eye of the Imam being always on the top of the mountain, the shreds which are left there by those who hold him in reverence remind him of what he ought to do in their behalf with Muhammad, Ali and the other holy personages, who are able to propitiate the Almighty in their favour. Hannay regarded these rags as charms for disease-transference. In his *Travels in Persia* he says, "After ten days'

journey we arrived at a caravanserai, where we found nothing but water. I observed a tree with a number of rags tied to the branches: these were so many charms which passengers coming from Ghilan, a province remarkable for agues, had left there, in a fond expectation of leaving their disease also on the same spot."

This evidence, however, needs corroboration. Meanwhile, considering how dangerous it is to generalise on the strength of stray statements and observations of foreigners, considering how these statements reveal only half-truths in the case of many Indian customs, we may take this evidence with caution. If, however, what Hannay says is based on the actual practices and beliefs of the Persian Mahomedans, we are led to infer that not only in several places in Europe but also in many parts of Asia the rag came to be regarded as a vehicle of disease, whatever may have been the original ideas underlying the offering. When we have evidence to show that in Europe pins and rags were used at wells for purposes of divination, it is not difficult to conceive the process of reasoning by which these articles came to be regarded as appropriate offerings to the indwelling spirits, no matter how insignificant their intrinsic value. These instruments of divination, having done their duty, must have been consigned to the waters as being the best place for depositing them. Then, probably, they were looked upon as indispensable offerings to the water goblins and then, although the practice of divination disappeared, these articles still came to be regarded as appropriate offerings for the well-spirits, and the rustic mind, ignorant of the genealogy of the custom, interpreted the survival of the ancient usages according to its own conception of sympathetic magic and either looked upon the rag-offering as a charm for disease-transference, or as a connecting link with the deity. This theory of the origin of the custom, which is here put forward with some diffidence, also explains the growth of the two conflicting theories (1) that the rags are vehicles of disease or charms for disease-transference, and (2) that they are simple offerings to propitiate the deity.

We have rambled far in our survey of the cult of rag offerings, because it represents a peculiarly interesting phase of water-worship. Of the rituals practised in the worship of water divinities it is the most rude and primitive. While the ceremonies of well-worship in the west correspond in several details, notably the offerings of flowers and coins, to the rituals with which we are familiar in this country, they contain some distinctive elements, the most remarkable of which is this practice of rag-offerings. We have cited numerous instances to show how common the practice was in Great Britain and Ireland and how it survives even to this day in certain parts, but while it was and still is a general feature of water-worship in those parts, it was and is unknown in India, although some folklorists have erroneously identified it with the entirely different, though seemingly analogous, practice of hoisting flags or *dhajas* at shrines and sacred trees. Perhaps the best explanation for the practice of rag-offering is that it may be a degenerate form of flag-offering.

# CHAPTER XIX.

## ANIMAL DEITIES OF WATER.

The western practices and customs we have noticed show that the cult of water-worship prevailed and survived throughout the west in a primitive form, evidently in a coarser form than in the east. The most remarkable feature of this rude worship is the belief in the presence of animals or fish as the presiding spirits or tutelary deities of the wells and it affords a very curious illustration of the savagery of those days in Europe. Originally, the worship was established for one great divinity of water. Later, however, both in the east and in the west, the inhabitants of different places came to believe in different spirits of water. Thus did the wells and rivers and pools and tanks of India come to be peopled by fairies and genii, goblins and witches, sayyids and saints. All these are represented in the guardian spirits of the wells and rivers and pools and tanks on the Continent. But our western friends go a step further and fill these wells with numerous animal gods which are very imperfectly represented in the waters of the east.

We find a general belief amongst the Hindus that the nether regions are inhabited by water snakes called Nags. Such were the Kaliya Nag, who resided at the bottom of the Jumna and attacked the infant Krishna by whom he was driven from that place, also the Serpent King of Nepal, Karkotaka, who dwelt in the lake Nagarasa when the divine lotus of Adi Buddha floated on its surface. It is believed that a pool at the temple of Treyugi Narayana in Garhwal is full of snakes of a yellow colour which emerge from water to be worshipped on the Nagpanchami day. Another belief equates the Nags with a species of semi-divine beings, half men and half serpents, who possess magnificent palaces under water. The

Puranas are full of traditions relating to princes who visited these palaces in watery regions and brought back beautiful Nagkanyas, or daughters of Nags, therefrom. For instance, Arjuna married a Nagkanya named Ulupi when he was living in exile with his brothers.

No other animal water-gods are found in Hindu mythology. In the west, however, the guardian spirits of pools and wells are frogs and trouts and worms and flies. At the well on the Devil's Causeway, between Ruckley and the Acton, the devil and his imps appear in the form of frogs; three frogs are always seen together, and these are the imps; the largest frog, representing the devil, appearing but seldom. The Fount of Tober Kieran, near Kells, County Meath, in Ireland, rises in a diminutive rough-sided basin of limestone of natural formation and evidently untouched by a tool. In the water are a brace of miraculous trout "which, according to tradition, have occupied their narrow prison from time immemorial. They are said never in the memory of man to have altered in size, and it is said of them that their appearance is ever the same."

In Galway there is a deep depression in the limestone called "Pigeon Hole," and the sacred rivulet running at the base of the chasm is believed to contain a pair of enchanted trout, one of which is said to have been captured some time ago by a trooper and cooked, but upon the approach of cold steel "the creature at once changed into a beautiful woman," and was returned to the stream. The well at Tullaghan, County Sligo, also harbours a brace of miraculous trout, not always visible to ordinary eyes. Similarly, at Bally Morereigh, in Dingle, County Kerry, is a sacred well called Tober Monachan, where a salmon and eel appear to those devotees whom the guardian spirits of the well wish to favour. In Scotland at Kilbride in Skye was a well with one trout. "The natives are very tender of it," says Martin, "and though they often chance to catch it in their wooden pails, they are very careful to preserve it from being destroyed." In the well at Kilmore, in Lorn, were two fishes, black in colour, never

augmenting in size or number nor exhibiting any alteration of colour, and the inhabitants of the place "doe call the saide fishes Easg Saint, that is to say, holie fishes."

Sir Laurence Gomme records other examples of a still more interesting nature. If, says Dalyell, a certain worm in a medicinal spring on the top of the hill in the parish of Strathdon were found alive, it augured the recovery of a patient, and in a well of Ardnacloich, in Appin, the patient, "if he bee to dye shall find a dead worme therein or a quick one, if health bee to follow." These, there can be little doubt, are the former deities of the spring thus reduced in status.

Mention has already been made of the presiding genius of the well of St. Michael near the Church of Kirkmichael, in Banffshire, who assumes the semblance of a fly, and who is immortal and always present in the water. "To the eye of ignorance," says the local account, "he might sometimes appear dead, but it was only a transmigration into a similar form, which made little alteration to the real identity." "It seems impossible," remarks Sir Laurence Gomme, "to mistake this as an almost perfect example where the guardian deity of the sacred spring is represented in animal form. More perfect than any other example to be met with in Britain and its isles is this singular description of the traditional peasant belief, it lifts the whole evidence as to the identification of wells in Britain as the shrine of ancient local deities into close parallel with savage ideas and thought." Professor Robertson Smith points out that the divine life of the waters is believed to reside in the sacred fish that inhabits them, and he gives numerous examples analogous to the Scottish and Irish, but whether represented by fish, or frog, or worm, or fly, in all their various forms, the point of the legends is that the sacred source is either inhabited by a demoniac being or imbued with demoniac life.

Here we may bring to a close our analysis of water-worship in East and West. Enough evidence has been

adduced to establish the identity of ideas and usages connected with the worship of water in India with those prevailing in Europe, particularly in the British Isles. Of all the great objects of nature water impressed people the most. It came to be worshipped everywhere. The foundation of the cult everywhere was the same. The forms and rituals were, therefore, part and parcel of the same common cult. There is, however, a difference in the degree in which they have survived in different places according to the stage of culture attained by the inhabitants of the place. These variations enable us to compare the stages of culture of different communities at different intervals, stages of culture which are practically lost to history, but to which folklore affords many a clue. In the legendary lore and traditional materials known as folklore there are precious fragments of information from which can be reared enduring monuments of history if these are carefully handled and scientifically sifted. The value, therefore, of these seemingly unmeaning beliefs and customs to the student of ethnology and folklore cannot be over-estimated, and this, if nothing else, may be pleaded in justification of the author's attempt to revive the dying fame of the miraculous pools and rivers and their wonder-working denizens.


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